Out Of Hopeful Grey Stuff Woven:
Revision and Civil War in Walt Whitman’s Blue Book

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This thesis investigates the evolution of Whitman’s verse through the Civil War period and into Reconstruction by paying particular attention to the anomalous and under-examined artefact known as the “Blue Book”—Whitman’s private copy of an 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* that retains his unpublished textual revisions. In examining this manuscript, I intend to describe Whitman’s interaction with the conflict in his role as a revisor: how he sifted, rearranged, and restructured his verse in response to the war. Using a combination of digital archival research and contemporary theories of revision, I develop a series of smaller readings taken from the innumerable annotations inscribed throughout the artefact. This thesis looks at Whitman’s work largely between 1860-1865 and considers it within a process of ongoing change. It is intended to contribute to the growing body of research that examines the often perplexing and vexed issue of Whitman’s revisions.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Master of Arts (Thesis only);
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
(iii) the thesis is fewer than 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: _______________________________  Date: 08/02/2018
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INTRODUCTION

The Blue Book and the ‘Cowardly Despicable Act’

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?

—Shakespeare, Sonnets (1609)

In a desk drawer at the Interior Department offices in Washington D.C., Whitman kept a blue-covered copy of the third (1860) edition of Leaves of Grass—its text scored with the grey pencil and ink emendations of countless revisions. Known as the Blue Book for its distinctive wrappers, this volume was Whitman’s working copy for an intended fourth edition of Leaves but became in June 1865 the notorious catalyst for the poet’s sudden dismissal from his departmental clerkship. Upon taking control of the Interior Department, Lincolnappointee James W. Harlan, now Secretary of the Interior, began issuing dismissal notes to some eighty clerks whose ‘loyalty,’ ‘fidelity to duty,’ and ‘moral character’ was, according an article in the New York Herald, ‘such as to justify an immediate dispensation of their services.’1 These departmental discharges included the poet after the Secretary (in Whitman’s words) ‘abstracted the book’ from his desk drawer during the night, examined it, and proceeded to terminate his services the following day.2 Enraged by the affair, Whitman’s friend William Douglas O’Connor arranged for the Assistant Attorney General to speak with Harlan and attempt to have the poet reinstated. Harlan, of course, refused—later insisting the dismissal was strictly the result of necessary cuts.3 Fuelled by righteous indignation, O’Connor composed the famous pamphlet titled The Good Gray Poet: A Vindication (1866)—apotheosizing Whitman as a ‘true American man’ and inaugurating the myth of its title.4

This account has been repeated with variations in emphasis by numerous critics. In 1929, the notoriously volatile H.L. Mencken memorably fulminated: ‘Let us repair, once a year, to

our accustomed houses of worship and there give thanks that God one day in 1865 brought together the greatest poet America had produced and the world’s damndest ass.\textsuperscript{5} To one of Whitman’s editors, Arthur Golden, Harlan’s action was the deplorable intervention of governmental ‘smut-hounds’\textsuperscript{6}. For Betsy Erkkila, the dismissals constituted no less than a moralistic ‘purge’ of the Department of the Interior by the new Secretary.\textsuperscript{7} To David S. Reynolds, the Harlan incident was the ‘first time’ that \textit{Leaves of Grass} had ‘collided with governmental prudery.’\textsuperscript{8} While critics have come to focus on what Jerome Loving has described as ‘the suppression of \textit{Leaves of Grass} and [the] encroachment on the freedom of American letters in general’, he argues that ‘there exists surprisingly little substantive evidence that Harlan fired Whitman for reasons other than those stated in his letter of 1894’\textsuperscript{9}. In this letter, Harlan maintained that the dismissal was wholly ‘\textit{on the ground that his services were not needed}’ [italics in original].\textsuperscript{10} Nevertheless, the new Secretary’s steps to prevent the poet from securing future government employment suggests that perhaps something more was at hand than simply not requiring Whitman’s services.\textsuperscript{11} Toward the end of his life, Whitman was characteristically magnanimous, telling Traubel:

\begin{quote}
  it’s history now: you don’t need my story: another thing, Horace: don’t ever assail Harlan as if he was a scoundrel: he wasn’t: he was only a fool: there was only a dim light in his noodle: he had to steer by that light […]. I have always had a latent sneaking admiration for his cowardly despicable act.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

While still not wholly resolved, the Blue Book incident forms one of the key moments in the establishment of the myth of the Good Gray Poet—a name that Whitman would continue to delight in, and play up to, for the remainder of his life.

Despite the centrality of the Blue Book to Whitman’s contemporary reputation as a poet, scholarly examination of it has been limited. This minimal critical attention may (in part) lie in the manuscript’s overtly labyrinthine structure. A patchwork of ink and pencil annotations,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Henry Louis Mencken, quoted in David S. Reynolds, \textit{Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography} (New York: Knopf, 1995), 455.
  \item \textsuperscript{6} Arthur Golden, “Walt Whitman’s Blue Book”, in WWE, 759.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} Betsy Erkkila, \textit{Whitman the Political Poet} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 246.
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Reynolds, \textit{Walt Whitman’s America}, 456.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} Jerome Loving, “Whitman and Harlan: New Evidence” \textit{American Literature} 48.2 (1976): 220.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} James Harlan, quoted in Loving, “Whitman and Harlan”, 220.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price, \textit{Re-Scripting Walt Whitman: An Introduction to His Life and Work} (Padstow: Blackwell, 2005), 94.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Traubel, \textit{With Walt Whitman}, 3:476.
\end{itemize}
the book is a knotted palimpsest of manuscript markings that were composed by Whitman over the pages of an 1860 Thayer and Eldridge edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Known for nearly a century as an unnamed ‘copy of the 1860 edition’ or ‘Whitman’s Thayer and Eldridge’, the Blue Book retains the poet’s unpublished textual revisions. Certain pages of this manuscript are so clotted with revisions that they border on illegible: lines are cancelled and replaced; letters are capitalized or elided in contractions; verse numberings are deleted and reordered; paragraphs are erased and then restored; printer’s notes are scribbled at the heads of various pages; holograph trial lines are inserted interlinearly, scrawled in the margins or appended on interleaved paper slips; paragraph markers are unevenly drawn between lines and within lines; inserted text is circled, cut, and moved about by guidelines; punctuation is reworked and excised; line groups and poems in their entirety are block cancelled by a single transverse line or marked with some variant of ‘Out’—indicating that the ‘piece’ (Whitman’s word for a poem, usually as a whole) is to be excluded from the future edition. In Arthur Golden’s tally, of the 456 pages of the manuscript, only thirty-four remain unrevised.\(^{13}\)

In addition to the complexity of its revisions, the Blue Book’s annotations overlap with the duration of the Civil War. A conflict famously characterized by the poet as ‘the centre, circumference, umbilicus of my whole career’, the Civil War roughly bookends the revisions preserved in the manuscript, beginning up to a year prior to the firing on Fort Sumter and concluding some three months after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox courthouse in April 1865. Upon arriving in Virginia in late 1862 and discovering his wounded brother George in good health, Whitman stayed on in the capital working part-time and nursing wounded soldiers in the army hospitals: bringing them fruit, sweets, writing paper, and (as Roy Morris, Jr. puts it) ‘the ineffable but not inconsiderable gift of his own magnetic, consoling presence.’\(^{14}\) Over time, the conflict became so central to the poet that he repeatedly declared the four years of war to be not only a momentous occasion in the history of the republic but intimately enmeshed with his entire oeuvre. In the prose summation “A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads”, Whitman writes:

> It is certain, I say, that, although I had made a start before, only from the occurrence of the Secession War, and what it show’d me as by flashes of lightning, with the


emotional depths it sounded and arous’d […] that only from the strong flare and provocation of that war’s sights and scenes the final reasons-for-being of an autochthonic and passionate song definitely came forth.¹⁵

By isolating and centralizing the war, George Hutchinson has argued, it came to represent ‘a pivotal event in universal history, a sacred conflict between democracy and its internal as well as external antagonists’. It ‘proved his poetry's validity and anchored his personal history, with all its private anguish, to the public life of the nation.’¹⁶

Whitman’s persistent remembrance and absorption of this ‘pivotal event’ has been thoroughly examined by scholars. Diverging and overlapping in their various modes of framing the poet’s interaction with the conflict—textual and sexual politics (Erkkila), the body and body-politics (Killingsworth and Moon), slavery and black citizenship (Klammer and Mancuso), the reticulations of desire (Coviello and Pollak), periodisation and temporality (Marrs), the transition into Reconstruction (Buinicki)—these analyses nevertheless share in the elision or sidelining of the Blue Book as a site of the war’s inscription.¹⁷ Focusing instead on the extraordinary richness of Whitman’s Civil War and Reconstruction documents—the wartime correspondence, the notebooks, the journalism, Drum-Taps and its Sequel, Memoranda During the War (in notebook form), the abandoned but later incorporated Songs Before Parting, and the 1867 edition of Leaves (among others)—the Blue Book is often cited only in passing, without close attention to its astounding wealth of revisions. Among scholars attempting to redress this neglect, Kenneth M. Price has argued that the Blue Book ‘illuminates Whitman’s poetic practice, particularly as it changed during (and in response to)

the Civil War,’ adding that the artefact is ‘invisible in the critical literature where one might most expect to find it clearly treated.’¹⁸ Since the revised text which Whitman evidently took such care in shaping never became an edition in itself, Price has suggested that it is often seen as a ‘shadow edition’—a book not wholly Leaves of Grass because it was not authorised by Whitman for publication.¹⁹ Scholars have tended to direct attention to the poet’s sewing of Drum-Taps into the fourth (1867) edition as the primary site of the war’s fusion with Leaves—an idea summarized in a recent book by Martin Buinicki. ‘It was during the years that followed Lee’s surrender,’ Buinicki writes, ‘that Whitman revised his poetic project to account for the shocks and disasters that had befallen the Union.’²⁰ ‘Most profoundly,’ he adds in a later article, ‘the poet would fold Drum-Taps into Leaves of Grass beginning with the 1867 edition, and from that moment onward, the war would be inextricably linked to Whitman’s work.’²¹ While the composition and eventual merger of Drum-Taps with Leaves of Grass is of course central to Whitman’s wartime poetry production, the Blue Book shows in minute detail this laborious fusion beginning some five or six years earlier than the publication of the 1867 edition.

In this thesis, I will be examining Whitman’s wartime revisions to Leaves of Grass in the annotated pages of the Blue Book. While not all of the revisions in the manuscript were completed during the war, most of them either interact with the conflict directly or are intimately linked with the lead up to war in the latter months of 1860. This immediacy of the war’s impact on the Blue Book revisions has long been under-examined. As Golden urges,

any meaningful assessment of Whitman’s poetry during those “real parturition years” as he called them, must begin with an examination of the Blue Book, for it was during the war years that he reflected in his revisions the doubts, the sense of urgency, the

¹⁹ Ibid., 683.
²⁰ Buinicki, Whitman’s Reconstruction, 8-9.
despair, and, ultimately, the hope for the future of the Union he had experienced during this time.\(^\text{22}\)

The dissolution of the poet’s beloved Union also divided what Peter Coviello has called Whitman’s ‘sexual-nationalist state’—a poetic tissue of amatory filaments that unite the country in a network of intimate interrelations. According to Coviello, this adhesive tissue was at stake in the conflict—the divisiveness and mass death of the Civil War rending these bonds apart.\(^\text{23}\) The Blue Book bears the revisory traces of this calamity. In an indispensable book on Whitman’s politics, Betsy Erkkila has stressed ‘the inseparability of the private discourses of male homosexual desire from the more public discourses of combat and democratic nationalism in Whitman’s poems of the Civil War.’\(^\text{24}\) Erkkila maintains that Whitman desired a book that was responsive to contemporary events, that ‘would grow with a growing nation’.\(^\text{25}\) While not a separate collection of Civil War poetry, Whitman’s Blue Book annotations reveal the tension between desire, combat, and nationalism so diligently threaded and rethreaded through the manuscript. In *Memoranda During the War*, Whitman maintains that the war was a ‘many-threaded drama’; so too are his wartime revisions.\(^\text{26}\) With each pencil mark or pasted-in slip, the arduous unravelling of the war is inscribed into the artefact. Something of what he later called the ‘whole involved, baffling, multiform whirl of the Secession period’ can be found bristling in the Blue Book’s pages.\(^\text{27}\)

**The Value of ‘Curios’: The Blue Book and Its Commentators**

The Blue Book’s first enthusiast—Horace Traubel—received the manuscript personally from Whitman in May 1890. As was his custom, Traubel recorded a conversation with the poet in the book’s front flyleaves after the volume was entrusted to him:


\(^{25}\) Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 78.


\(^{27}\) Traubel, *With Walt Whitman*, 3:95.
Received from Walt Whitman May 23rd 1890—W. saying: “You fellows value these curios more than I do. This will help you to see how the book grew, if that is anything. But I guess you would know how I grew if you never possessed the book. This book is a mile-post.” —And he went on, “This gives a glimpse into the workshop. It is wonderful to me how great a store you fellows have got to set on these things. God be with you!”

This inscription suggests that Whitman sensed some significance in the Blue Book as an artefact, keeping it among his papers as he did for twenty-five years. Along with the multiform revisions so uniquely intertwined with the poet himself, the Blue Book holds a key position in Whitman’s considerable corpus of Civil War and Reconstruction texts.

After decades of Traubel’s failed attempts at publishing a facsimile edition, the book eventually came into the possession of the illustrious Whitman collector Oscar Lion.29 Donating it to the New York Public Library in 1933, the manuscript garnered little attention until the 1960s when it found its first authority: Arthur Golden.30 With funding through the New York Public Library and Oscar Lion himself, Golden oversaw a substantial editing project that included the facsimile and transcription of a magnificently lavish two-volume reproduction called simply Walt Whitman’s Blue Book: The 1860-1 Leaves of Grass Containing His Manuscript Additions and Revisions (1968). This edition is a marvel in itself: Whitman’s blue and red pencilling are kept in their original colour; the unevenly cut unfolding paper inserts are reproduced with their two-sided texts—some colourised, some in facsimile-grey. Included in this immodestly deluxe edition (it came fitted into its own cardboard slipcase replete with an image of the poet from the 1860 Leaves) was an exhaustive second volume containing a genetic transcription of the entire manuscript subtitled Textual Analysis. This volume disentangles Whitman’s often illegible script by reconstituting its revisory history into sequential stages.31

30 Another inscription on the Blue Book’s flyleaf notes the acquisition by the library: ‘Acquired Sept 1933’ (Blue Book 1-6). Throughout this thesis, my flyleaf numbering takes its form from Heather L. Jackson’s Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): ‘In numbering flyleaves I count back from the first printed page and forward from the last, −3 means the third printed page before the first printed page, +1 the first blank page after the last printed one’ (xvi).
31 With the exception of the Introduction and appendices, this edition has the irregular distinction of containing no page numbers of its own but is instead keyed to pages in the 1860 Leaves of which it is a
Golden is, by a large margin, the most eager and thorough critic of the Blue Book. His work on it comprises two articles, the editorship of the facsimile edition (with a lengthy Introduction) and the indispensable transcriptions. His Textual Analysis volume and his introductory essay represent the longest, most sustained investigation to date. In his Introduction, Golden maintains that ‘a single controlling idea’ emerges from the revisions: ‘the dominating theme of nationalism, of the organic oneness of all the States and of their peoples, South as well as North’. 32 The annotations preserved in the book, he goes on to argue, were ostensibly ‘a desire for economy’, an attempt to bring ‘the central theme of the poem more sharply into focus’. 33 ‘In the Blue Book,’ he continues, Whitman ‘went through a number of poems with a kind of ruthlessness, at times a frenzy, in his attempt to tighten and reshape them’. 34 While this observation may be accurate, Golden largely ignores in his readings the material dimensions of the artefact he so lovingly documents. In spite of minutely detailing each revision on each page of the Blue Book, he often looks to a conjectural final form of the poem—setting less weight on the conspicuous and unruly annotations.

While Golden’s Textual Analysis volume is dedicated to revision—and the New York University variorum edition he co-edited exists because of revision—he spends little time explaining exactly what it involves. What he does do, though, is provide a visualization of Whitman’s revisory habits. For example, in section 136 of “Walt Whitman” (later, “Song of Myself”), Whitman revises his often-quoted self-declaration ‘Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos, | Disorderly, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, breeding,’ to ‘Walt Whitman, am I, of mighty Manhattan the son | Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding’:

transcription and textual commentary. In this volume, Golden always marks a revision to the page number in which it is inserted rather than the page on which it appears. In the textual apparatus, the square brackets “[ ]” signify erasures while the triangle brackets “< >” refer to insertions. The empty space between the square brackets with an added superscript ‘e’ indicate text that was erased and is unable to be recovered. The first line of each revision (indicated by a line number) is Golden’s version of the final revision. In my transcriptions I place the final revision last in sequence. Throughout this thesis I have silently amended Golden’s transcriptions to more accurately reflect the markings on the manuscript. For example, the frequent ‘+’ signs that Whitman uses for ‘and’ are rendered by Golden as ampersands. I have used the ‘+’ symbol throughout. For a full description of the apparatus, see Blue Book II:429. For the ‘difficulty’ or ‘convenience’ of a textual apparatus, see G. Thomas Tanselle, “Critical Editions, Hypertexts, and Genetic Criticism” Romantic Review 86.3 (1995): 586; and John Bryant, The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 127-128.

33 Ibid., xlii, liii.
34 Ibid., xli.

8
Golden transcribes these lines as follows:

136.1 Walt Whitman, am I, of mighty Manhattan the son,
1 Walt Whitman, [an American, one of the roughs, a
kosmos,] Manhattan the son,
2 Walt Whitman, [ ]<am I, of mighty> Manhattan
   The son,

136.2 Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding,
1 [Disorderly] <turbulent>, fleshy, … drinking, <and>
   Breeding,

(Blue Book II:54)

Whitman here revises his most famous declaration of poetic personhood for the first time—a declaration that would continue to be revised through the remaining editions of Leaves of Grass. In this set of revisions, the poet localises his nationality from ‘an American’ to ‘of mighty Manhattan’—emphasizing his own lineage from a ‘mighty’ city rather than from the humble ‘roughs’—and then reducing himself in magnitude by deleting ‘kosmos’, a word he restores in 1871. Among the modifications to the poet’s persona, these revisions show the manuscript identity of the artefact—that its most prominent feature is the irrepressible annotations covering the 1860 text. These handwritten jottings have been helpfully described as ‘peritext’ by Gerard Genette—a term derived from the Latin prefix peri- meaning ‘around’. Defined ‘as a category of the paratext, located within the same volume as the printed text’, the peritext is both incorporated within, and distinct from, the original text.35 Able to merge only in a later edition, the Blue Book’s annotations rest in an indeterminate mid-phase between two (or more) versions, lodged in enigmatic contact with the frozen print-

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text beneath. Dirk Van Hulle magnificently calls these annotatory knots a ‘peritextual epidermis’—tracings that are responsive and alive like skin or situated just above an impressed surface.36 While not all revisions in the Blue Book are peritext (the holograph paste-ons, for example), Golden’s laying-out in a genetic transcription graphically reveals the interactions of this ‘peritextual epidermis’ with the 1860 text. Each line’s changes through time are organised sequentially, thus constituting an attempt to recreate (or represent) compositional stages—what D.C. Greetham has called ‘a synchronic representation of diachronous composition’.37 This allows not only for the movement of the unfolding line to be traced but also its interaction within a larger cluster of lines. Revisions, as will be seen, have something of a cascading, or rippling, effect. They are not uni-directional nor have strictly localized areas of influence. They modify the writing in numerous ways, reshaping the interaction between sections from across the book as a whole.

In a well-known book on textuality, Jerome McGann reminds us that ‘[a]ll editing is an act of interpretation’.38 Bernard Cerquiglini, too, boldly (and not without hyperbole) maintains that ‘[e]very copy is alteration’.39 My examination of the Blue Book will be entirely conducted through the use of copies, just as my analysis of the transcriptions will employ a modified version of those prepared by Golden in the Textual Analysis volume of his edition of the Blue Book. As many textual scholars have noted, the conversion of a written text into a transcription is not as unproblematic as it may at first seem. ‘One obvious example of the power of the visual image to undermine transcription lies in the conversion of handwriting into typed letters,’ writes Kathryn Sutherland, Project Director of Jane Austen’s Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition. ‘Print,’ she adds, ‘provides fewer choices than handwriting.’40 Likewise circumspect as to the possibility of accurate transcription, Cerquiglini observes that ‘[t]ranscription is treacherous because the human hand finds it very hard to give up the elusive possession of sense. In cases of deliberate revision as well as careless mistakes, something is at work to restore life to inert inscription.’41 This is to emphasise that in every reading (even within each reading) revised texts are not easily stabilised into concrete form. Not only the reproduction of graphic inscriptions into print but

36 Van Hulle, Modern Manuscripts, 215.
37 David C. Greetham, Theories of the Text (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 201.
41 Cerquiglini, In Praise of the Variant, 2.
the very legibility of the words on the page is in dispute in the Blue Book. What D. F. McKenzie describes as ‘getting the right words in the right order’ is achieved with more than a modicum of doubt.\textsuperscript{42} To negotiate this editorial input, I will attempt to use Golden’s transcriptions as a tool to tease out operations within the manuscript rather than confusing them for textually stable poems. In this way, transcription resembles Lisa Samuels’ and Jerome McGann’s notion of ‘deformance’—the deliberate splicing and reordering of a text in order to emphasise a particular feature of it.\textsuperscript{43} By laying out revisions as they were created (even if speculative) it allows for the movement of Whitman’s modifications to be sketched—a reality not immediately visible in the original. In the process of revision analysis, transcription becomes an essential visualising tool but it also gives a misleading impression of exhaustiveness. This has contributed to my decision to provide screenshots of the passages under investigation. While the screenshot is still a reproduction of a reproduction of the original—if the original/copy dichotomy is still a valid one—it is my intention that it will provide a somewhat closer version of what I am investigating, rather than merely supplying transcriptions.

In a section called ‘Aborted Editions’ of The New Walt Whitman Handbook, Gay Wilson Allen gives a brief overview of the Blue Book’s place within Whitman’s various editions of Leaves. He argues that among the many annotations of the artefact, Whitman ‘de-emphasize[d]’ the ‘personal despair of some of his 1860 poems.’ Perhaps influenced by Golden’s reading, Allen goes on to note that most of the revisions were ‘improvements in diction, rhythm, and the elimination of repetition.’\textsuperscript{44} While some ‘personal despair’ may indeed have been removed from the book, the revisions, as will become clear, are not so easily reduced into an effort towards concision. Taking a broader historical approach, Betsy Erkkila sees the Blue Book as a symbol of state censorship and an ‘attempt to bind up the nation’s wounds’.\textsuperscript{45} Erkkila argues that most of Whitman’s revisions ‘work toward an artistic tightening and sharpening of word, image, phrase, and unit.’\textsuperscript{46} Echoing Golden’s emphasis on the poet’s attempts to secure an undivided Union, Erkkila asserts that ‘behind his artistic

\textsuperscript{44} Allen, New Walt Whitman Handbook, 110.
\textsuperscript{45} Erkkila, Political Poet, 260.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 261.
reshaping is the overall impulse to mend the split in the 1860 *Leaves* between private and public, lover and poet as a means of affirming, or reaffirming, the principle of organic union in self, nation, and cosmos. This focus on ‘the principle of organic union’ will be pursued in Chapter Three. Going to great lengths to rebuild the wartime Union, Whitman reshapes its multiple (and multiplying) representations appearing throughout the 1860 edition.

In the most recent article on the manuscript, Kenneth M. Price makes the insightful claim that what has been ignored in studies of the Blue Book is Whitman’s role as a public servant. ‘[O]ne probable result of his steady work as a government employee,’ Price argues,

was his absorption of a governmental propriety, a gradually internalized sense of what suited the moment and situation. More than prudishness, the sheer orderliness of the documents he created for the government—so different from the fairly chaotic nature of his private manuscripts—helps explain some of the taming of Whitman’s language in the Blue Book.

While Whitman’s years of governmental service have certainly been overlooked—and the language of the Blue Book eventually ‘tamed’ in some of the final readings—its annotations can still retain a certain unruliness. Understandably viewing the Blue Book as a poet’s effort to secure finalized poems or lines, Price appears to set aside the cascading array of variants encompassed by the verse in reaching that final stage. As will be seen, the Blue Book offers a rich repository of multilayered annotations that at times mirror the ‘fairly chaotic nature of [Whitman’s] private manuscripts’. I take up Price’s observation that the Blue Book is ‘a highly complex poetry manuscript’ and ‘one of the most dramatic manifestations of Whitman editing himself—recasting, rejecting, rearranging, repurposing *Leaves of Grass*.’ But more particularly, I draw on Price’s assertion that the Blue Book ‘illuminates Whitman’s artistic response to the war.’ In this thesis, I read the Blue Book through the lens of revisory processes made immanent by the conflict, tracing how these revisions reshape *Leaves of Grass* by emphasizing, cutting, replacing or supplementing certain verses present in the 1860 text.

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47 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 682.
50 Ibid., 683.
The Activity of Revision

Most published literary texts are subjected to some form of alteration both during production and after publication. Copy-editing, deletion, correction, substitution, even the transference of written text into a printed form or the conversion of one file format into another constitutes a revisory phase in a text branching into other texts. Erick Kelemen has roughly categorised revision into four overlapping groups: authorial or non-authorial, structural or lexical.\(^{51}\) In this thesis, I will be focused almost entirely on authorial revision of a lexical kind—those completed in Whitman’s hand over the pages of the Blue Book.

‘Whitman was the ultimate reviser,’ Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price write in their introduction to the ‘manuscript origins’ of the poet’s work—a poet who was ‘continually shuffling, retitling, editing, and reconceptualizing’ his writings throughout his career. ‘Leaves of Grass,’ they observe, ‘was Whitman’s title for a process more than a product: every change in his life and in his nation made him reopen the book to revision.’\(^{52}\) Folsom’s and Price’s analysis turns attention to the ‘thousands of manuscript pages that he left behind and which, to this day, have not been adequately studied.’\(^{53}\) One reason for this, the authors suggest, is that Whitman ‘has always been thought of as a “poet of print”’. ‘Because of this, we often have viewed Whitman as a poet who begins and ends in print, when in fact he labored hard in script.’\(^{54}\) This hard labour in script has been examined in studies that inspect or bring to light the poet’s vast array of manuscripts. Perhaps beginning with Horace Traubel’s preservation of primary documents (including the Blue Book) and extending to the manuscript work of Emory Holloway and Fredson Bowers, the unearthing of manuscript material to map the ongoing transformations of the poetry and prose has long provided a window into Whitman’s work. But more recently, an expanded conception of revision as a way into the hard labour in script of many writers and periods has drawn increasing attention as a process worthy of examination in itself.\(^{55}\) While scholars from a range of bibliographical

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\(^{51}\) Erick Kelemen, *Textual Editing and Criticism: An Introduction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), 61. This typology of revision is, of course, not exhaustive. John Bryant, for example, has described revisory processes that include ‘cultural revision’ and ‘editorial revision’. Francesca K. A. Martelli adds ‘collaborative revision’, i.e. revision undertaken in congress with another. See Bryant, *The Fluid Text*, 101-11; and Martelli, *Ovid’s Revisions: the Editor as Author*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4.

\(^{52}\) Folsom and Price, *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman*, ix.


\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*

and editorial traditions have long attempted to come to terms with textual fluidity, this thesis will view the Blue Book’s tangle of intersecting lines primarily through John Bryant’s notion of ‘the fluid text’.

‘Simply put,’ Bryant casually argues, ‘the fluid text is any literary work that exists in more than one version. It is “fluid” because versions flow from one to another.’ ‘[T]he only “definitive text”,’ he urges, ‘is a multiplicity of texts’. Since the Blue Book’s revisions cannot be stabilized into a complete ‘edition’ or settled ‘version’, the bifurcating textual processes it stores allow for a flow of variants to be traced. ‘We are happy to acknowledge that any single text can yield up multiple interpretations,’ Bryant deftly observes, ‘but the mind resists the thought that single literary works are themselves multiform, that they exist in various and varied physical states, each capable of yielding its own set of interpretations.’

In this thesis, I will be taking a granular or atomistic approach to revision. Probing the interstices of revised fragments within a single manuscript, I aim to avoid positioning the revisions as secondary to the published poems or to final-stage versions. As Whitman said to Traubel from his home in Camden: ‘I am but a fragment, anyhow—Leaves of Grass is a modality of but fragments’. This tight focus reveals that between the printed poems lies an indefinite textual space: a branching between states that is filled with lost trajectories, as yet unexamined variants, and dead-ends that are similarly revealing and yet to be fully explored. ‘A revision has a beginning, middle, and end’ Bryant maintains,

and its end does not negate the beginning or middle. A revision occupies a space and reflects the passage of time; it reveals options and choices; it has direction. It is a chord of dissonances and harmonies, and not a single note. A writer’s revision presents us with multiple texts vying for position on the page.

These ‘multiple texts vying for position’ can be found throughout the annotated pages of the Blue Book. Captured by Whitman in the 1860 edition’s “Enfans D’Adam” 3 (later, “I Sing the Body Electric”), the poet writes: ‘All is procession, | The universe is a procession, with a


56 Bryant, The Fluid Text, ix, 2, 12-13.
57 Ibid., 2.
58 Traubel, With Walt Whitman, 5:399.
measured and beautiful motion’. In the Blue Book he adds after the first line: ‘The pageant is moving through Time’ (Blue Book I:297). This thesis intends to capture something of the various revisory processes at work in the manuscript’s fraught traversal through the Civil War.

My first objective is to begin an examination of the revisions drawn across the Blue Book’s pages by investigating the distinctive material properties of the manuscript. In describing the writing surface through which Whitman revised—its unique array of strikethroughs, guidelines, asterisks, manicules, and paste-ons—I work against the habit of subordinating these material-textual features to the isolation of clearly readable lines staged for easy comparison. ‘Print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness,’ writes Walter Ong, ‘[i]t can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete or self-consistent.’ In describing the variability and fundamental disorderedness of much of the Blue Book annotations, I intend to show that these revisions are not necessarily ‘complete or self-consistent’ as tiny poetic parts impeccably frozen into transcription. Chapter One will begin by briefly tracing Whitman’s revisions throughout his career—revealing the centrality of revisory practices to his poetry as well as to his work as a whole. My focus will then narrow to describe the Blue Book’s idiosyncratic part in such processes. For reasons of space, my focus will be largely trained on the Blue Book itself, rather than on its many interactions with later (or earlier) editions of Leaves. I will describe its unique textual properties—its annotations, its status as a palimpsest, its distinctive paste-ons—without which the revisions become separated from their material base. I then turn to anatomizing the artefact’s annotations at the level of the book, seeking to show how Whitman revised rather than just describing the end products of that revision. In doing so, I set the groundwork for the study of Whitman’s revisions on a thematic level, tracing how they can be clustered into patterns and read through their unique appearance on the page.

My second objective is to group together these material features—utilising Bryant’s notion of the ‘fluid text’ and Golden’s transcriptions—to unpack the minute involutions of Whitman’s reworking into what I am calling ‘revisory patterns’. While Golden calls these patterns ‘poetic strategies’ or a ‘revisory strategy’, these terms seem to imply a control over a

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final product—or telegraph that final product—securing the revisions with a fixity they may not possess.\textsuperscript{62} While ‘revisory patterns’ is still an imperfect term—revisions are not easily shaped or stabilized into patterns—it avoids the sense that I will be seeing these revisions from their final stage or describing the workings of the poet’s mind as he revised. With the textual intermingling of the book in view, I examine these manuscript revisions to illuminate, as far as I am able, the influence of the Civil War not so much as the source of the revisions but as a setting or scene for their enactment—a way of threading revisions into a conceivable sequence. ‘Over the span of the Civil War,’ Arthur Golden writes,

Whitman carefully revised the bulk of the poems in this edition, bringing them more closely in line with his on-the-spot responses to the war. […] The Blue Book enables one to recover Whitman’s overall poetic strategies for \textit{Leaves of Grass} under the urgent pressures of war during this crucial period of his career.\textsuperscript{63}

To develop these revisory patterns, I will be isolating three large groups of revisions organized around a set of intersecting rubrics—each chapter expanding outward in successive levels of focus or magnification. Chapter One, as has been said, will trace patterns of Whitman’s revisory \textit{practices}—the annotatory habits of a poet at work. Chapters Two and Three will draw on these inscriptions to develop two broad thematic groupings: a discourse of war and a discourse of Union. While not wholly separable from each other and thoroughly intermingled with concomitant discourses of sex, race, legislative politics, ecology, gender, and religion (among others), these two broad rubrics will draw together miscellaneous revisions spread throughout the manuscript. Chapter Two will begin this thematic treatment by selecting revisions that depict the turmoil of warfare. Beginning with the insertion and thorough revision of a language of war in the 1860 text, I move on to an examination of the addition and reworking of the figure of the soldier—a central wartime character. I conclude the chapter on these insertions’ transformative effects on an antebellum figure known as the Democratic or Union ‘Mother’—a figure who becomes increasingly ‘weapon’d’ and ‘warlike’ (Blue Book I:10). Again drawing on revisions from across the book, Chapter Three will treat Whitman’s standing as a poet and revisor of Union. As noted above, the concept of Union comes under serious revisory pressure in the Blue Book. The chapter begins with a


discussion of the erasure and complex reworking of the presence of enslaved people and the language of antislavery and concludes with a broader discussion of the shifting figurations of the bifurcated national order engendered by the war.

While these analyses draw attention to the proliferating annotations that cover the manuscript, they also draw focus away from a largely unregarded dimension: text that remains unrevised. In the Blue Book, the 1860 text is not only supplemented in revision but is also preserved without amendment. These instances of conserved text form a part of the revisory process that I am calling ‘preservative revision’. This refers to segments of a partially revised manuscript in which text remains either lightly revised or wholly unrevised. Amid the wealth of annotations within the Blue Book there remains large swathes of the 1860 text that are left intact. While it may seem counterintuitive to group these textual remains as revisions—they appear to represent the absence rather than the presence of revision—they continue to be an important and often unnoted component of the revisory process. If no annotations mark a section of the manuscript it becomes distinct by the very absence of annotation. In the Blue Book, passages that are left unrevised are often as revealing as what has been reworked.

I will read Whitman’s manuscript through two reproductions: the Golden genetic edition and the digitized version available from the online *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org) edited by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price. In transcribing revisions, I silently amend Golden’s standard but rather confusing textual apparatus (seen above) with an apparatus of my own—utilising a now-common practice of strikethroughs for cancellations and superscript for insertions. By preserving this edition’s indispensable genetic laying-out (indicated by numbers in the left margin) it will enable the annotations to be read in the order of their inscription. To keep within space limitations, I have not attempted an exhaustive analysis of the artefact. There are simply too many revisions to

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64 All screenshots from Whitman’s manuscripts will be sourced from this online repository. Page images specifically from the Blue Book can be viewed at http://whitmanarchive.org/published/1860/Blue_book/images/index.html.

65 Many aspects of this manuscript cannot be reproduced in transcription or in screenshots. Kathryn Sutherland has called these non-type inscriptions ‘sub-semiotic marks’: the web of unreproducible features of the writing surface—doodles, scratches, and glue-marks along with inks, pencil and paper types. As Sutherland admits, ‘even the most exact reproduction cannot duplicate all the features and properties of its original. In the case of a digital image of a manuscript the medium itself is lost: we have the visual impression of paper and ink but not the physical materials of the original: its three-dimensionality, its feel and weight, and its substance’ (Sutherland, “Introduction to the Edition” in Sutherland (ed.) *Jane Austen’s Fiction Manuscripts Digital Edition*, accessed 9 December 2017. Available online at http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/edition/intro.html). Cerquiglini justly observes that the attainment of a ‘perfect facsimile’ is like ‘something out of Borges’: it would be ‘the original work itself’ (Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant*, 22).
discuss: almost every page contains a connection to an earlier manuscript or to a later edition. Instead, I give an introductory overview of its unusual materiality with a focus on selecting and grouping annotations around the key themes outlined above.

Throughout this thesis, I develop a series of smaller readings taken from the forking, shifting, and minute reconfigurations inscribed throughout the manuscript as a whole. I work in progressive levels of magnification, moving from patterns of inscription in the material artefact itself and out to the immediate manifestations of war and still further into broader ideas of a divided Union. Without abandoning each layer in the process, I examine revisions as fragments across the Blue Book rather than strictly as individual poems within it, delimited to that poem alone. As Whitman wrote in an 1857 letter to Sarah Tyndale: ‘The difference is in the new character given to the mass, by the additions.’66 One limitation of this method is that it dampens the uniqueness or distinctiveness of each individual poem. But it also allows for a revisory thread to be picked up and traced—or ‘plotted’ as Francesca Martelli terms it—through the book wherever it may be found.67 While the location of the revision—the context of its insertion—will still be critical in any reading of a revised passage, I intend to prevent any one revision (or set of revisions) from commanding too heavy a place in Whitman’s revising. In examining this artefact of Whitman’s career-long reworking of *Leaves of Grass*, I hope to contribute to growing body of work that examines the poet’s writings throughout a conflict that he refused to call a civil war—referring to it instead as ‘the secession outbreak’, the ‘Four Years’ War’, or simply ‘the war’.


The history of authorial revision abounds in illustrious examples: Montaigne’s various enhancements to the four editions of the *Essais*; Robert Burton’s similar accretions throughout the five editions of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*; the steadily increasing manuscript collections of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*; Dickinson’s lexical variants marked with a ‘+’ at the foot of the hand-written, hand-bound fascicles; Frederick Douglass’s supplements to his career-spanning autobiographies; Pound’s and Eliot’s much-examined excisions from *The Waste Land* (1922); and Marianne Moore’s ‘omissions’ from her *Complete Poems* (1967). While revision is a habitual practice of a great many authors, its transformations are yet to be fully unravelled and described. How exactly to unpack, let alone analyse, its multiform effects is still an open question.

Conversing with Traubel in late 1888 at his home in Camden, an elderly Whitman spoke of some of his friends’ disapproval at his constant revising. ‘Take the last edition of Leaves of Grass,’ he was reported to have said, ‘some of the fellows think my changes have not improved the book; yet it is my final judgment that the book is just right as it is now—that it should be permitted to stand’.¹ The poet’s evident satisfaction with his revisions exposes a poetry in a large part generated by revision. It is such a constant presence that it lurks behind almost every poem and published document. In their Introduction to the *Comprehensive Reader’s Edition* of *Leaves*, Harold Blodgett and Sculley Bradley benignly note a ‘creative pressure welling from profound depths’ that generates the revisions, sourcing them to the poet’s ‘vivid sense of endless materials’.² More recently, Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price have described Whitman’s persistent revising as ‘nearly obsessive’.³ In 2005, the Library of Congress even held an exhibition titled “Revising Himself” in which some of the materials of

Whitman’s revisions were made available for public display. While Whitman’s revising does not require defence or justification, it does demand close attention. Text is so often expanded, excised, moved about, transposed, repunctuated, and inserted that the driving impulse of the six lifetime-published editions of *Leaves of Grass* could be said to be an unceasing and restless revision. It propels and enables each new edition.

Of Whitman revising, there remain fragments of testimonial evidence. ‘I am satisfied with Leaves of Grass (by far the most of it),’ Whitman wrote to O’Connor at the close of the Civil War, before almost immediately adding, ‘but there are a few things I shall carefully eliminate in the next issue, & a few more I shall considerably change.’ After six editions and countless revisions, Whitman, at the end of his life, declared shockingly to Traubel: ‘I do not revise much: yet I do make changes.’ What Whitman meant here by ‘revise’ is not entirely clear but may refer to more fundamental changes rather than just a tinkering around the edges—his programme, his central themes, remaining largely the same. Almost three years later, in August 1891, Whitman informed Traubel that ‘long long ago, before the ‘Leaves’ had ever been to the printer, I had them in half a dozen forms—larger, smaller, recast, outcast, taken apart, put together—viewing them from every point I knew—even at the last not putting them together and out with any idea that they must eternally remain unchanged.’ *Leaves of Grass*, it seems, was from its inception always in a state of flux. While revision tends to taper off after the fourth edition, a lifetime of correction and annotation of so many of Whitman’s writings—from the earliest notebooks, to the prose pamphlets and books, to the reworking and republication of periodical articles—forms an intrinsic part of his working process. Some hint of the tinkerer’s art is given in “Proto-Leaf”:

Hereby applying these leaves to the new ones, from
the hour they unite with the old ones,
Coming among the new ones myself, to be their
companion – coming personally to you now,
Enjoining you to acts, characters, spectacles, with

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The ‘leaves’ of *Leaves of Grass* (its pages) are here applied to other leaves—uniting the ‘old’ with the ‘new’—which are then fused with the persona, the exalted companion of the leaves themselves. Whitman’s verse becomes a joining of ‘you’ (anyone or any thing) to ‘me’ (the polymorphous poet) by the reordering of poetical pages. This description reveals a body of work revised at almost every conceivable phase of composition. The early notebook entries of lines that would grow into the first edition of *Leaves* (‘I am the poet of slaves, and of the masters of slaves | I am the poet of the body | And I am’) are themselves revised, struckthrough with a crossing line. In ‘a feat of autogenesis’, writes Karen Sánchez-Eppler, Whitman takes these early steps as the poet of *Leaves of Grass*, ‘record[ing]’ (and later undermining) ‘his developing sense of what it means to call himself “poet.”’ In the later work, much of this unfurling insight is shaped through what Dirk Van Hulle has called ‘epigenesis’—the development of a text out of an existing text; or here the creation of a poetry out of an existing poetry. Future editions grow out of previous editions; each shedding and accumulating content as it unfolds. ‘Not the progressive establishment of meaning, but a promiscuous letting loose, a rich unraveling, is the epistemology of Whitman’s poetics,’ writes Max Cavitch of this process, ‘which patently reveals itself in the series of rich unravelings that, through its successive editions, constitutes *Leaves of Grass*.’

This revisory practice is nourished through every phase of Whitman’s career. Articles, notebooks, draft writings on scraps of paper, all are revised into published editions of prose and poetry which in turn fuel further editions. Even Whitman’s private correspondence and Maurice Bucke’s co-authored biography of the poet show signs of careful revising. This

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10 See Van Hulle, *Modern Manuscripts*, 214. Combining the process of epigenesis (a term taken from evolutionary biology) with Genette’s idea of peritext, Van Hulle calls the type of revisions found in the drafts of Montaigne’s *Essais* ‘epigenetic peritext’ (216). Whitman’s Blue Book annotations also fall into this category.


12 See Nicole Gray and Kenneth M. Price “The Letters in the Litter: Messy Boundaries and Other Conundrums in Editing Walt Whitman’s Correspondence” *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* 37 (2016): 1-35. In this essay, Gray and Price piece together the multiple revised fragments of the 1890 letter to John Addington Symonds in which Whitman declares that he has six children.
history of revision is localised not just to manuscripts but to the process of printing itself. In one notable instance, Whitman makes stop-press changes to the 1855 edition, adding a period in the final line of the poem that would become “Song of Myself”: ‘I stop some where waiting for you.’\textsuperscript{13} This rather modest change curbs the previously expansive continuance of the poet’s song, shaving it off into finality—a not insignificant amendment. Whitman’s mode of composition is one which Matt Miller describes as ‘collage’: lines are picked up, modified, and placed in unusual arrangements throughout the book.\textsuperscript{14} In Whitman’s work, text flows between clusters, between the prefaces and poetry, between intermediate drafts. The poems of \textit{Leaves of Grass}—the lettering, punctuation, type, and order of lines that compose them—are always moving about, even shifting out of the book. To read one of Whitman’s verses is very often to read fragments of the string of poems it once was; it is to enter into the morphological history of the poem by a fusion of ‘old’ leaves with the ‘new’. This chapter will examine various components of textual revision found in the Blue Book while developing a more generalized framework in which to view the complex series of textual processes grouped collectively under the banner of ‘revision’.

\textbf{Annotation, Palimpsest, Paste-On: The Material Blue Book}

Few details are known of the frequency of annotation within the Blue Book. The book itself was a reviewer’s advance copy of the 1860 edition, bound irregularly in blue wrappers, that Whitman received from the publisher sometime in May 1860—the month of the book’s eventual publication.\textsuperscript{15} The annotations that cluster its pages, Kenneth Price suspects, were perhaps begun even before the official publication of the 1860 \textit{Leaves} but were most likely started ‘in the latter part of 1860 or early 1861.’\textsuperscript{16} Leaving approximately a year between the acquisition of the book and the outbreak of war, it is not known exactly where the bulk of the revisions were composed but (again according to Price) they were likely completed prior to 1863 with the later revisions drafted while Whitman was at his desk at the Indian Bureau.\textsuperscript{17}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item The letter itself is a hodgepodge of pasted-together paper scraps and crossings-out chained together to form an epistle that runs far longer in physical length than a traditional letter.
  \item Miller, \textit{Collage of Myself}, xiii-xviii.
  \item The title page of course dates the book from 1860-61. According to Folsom and Price, this dating appears as if Whitman had ‘anticipated the liminal nature of that moment in American history – the fragile moment between a year of peace and a year of war’ (Folsom and Price, \textit{Re-Scripting Walt Whitman}, 76).
  \item Price, “Love, War, and Revision”, 681.
  \item \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
The final date given of a revision, one of only four in the book, is July 1865 (Blue Book 1:302)—only about a month after Whitman’s dismissal from the Interior Department.\(^{18}\) Based entirely on the sheer quantity of added and reworked material, it is clear that Whitman spent considerable time and great care reshaping its pages. After having left the manuscript at his mother’s house in 1863, he wrote to her with some anxiety:

Mother, when you or Jeff writes again, tell me if my papers & MSS are all right—I should be very sorry indeed if they got scattered, or used up or any thing—especially the copy of Leaves of Grass covered in blue paper, and the little MS book “Drum Taps,” & the MS tied up in the square, spotted (stone-paper) loose covers—I want them all carefully kept.\(^{19}\)

Despite the energy Whitman expended on its revisions, the Blue Book was ultimately never used as the sole source for a full edition of *Leaves*. Only fragments of its revisions, again heavily revised, are allowed passage into the fourth (1867) edition and beyond. Finally published just over a century later in the 1968 facsimile reproduction edited by Arthur Golden, the Blue Book did not enter public circulation until the twentieth century. While most of the annotations were rejected in later editions, the holograph insertions and handwritten annotations preserve its obscure, yet perhaps central, role in the development of Whitman’s primary book of poems. In this respect, the Blue Book remains more than a manuscript of a *possible* fourth edition. It is a workshop (in that shopworn phrase) for the dismantling and reconstruction of *Leaves*. Isolated from the authorised editions, it is a uniquely layered and visually confronting poetic manuscript. A repository of revisory progression, the Blue Book exposes the working process of the poet through its manifold textual reconfigurations but also obscures that process by sheer abundance. It shows in tangible detail how Whitman reshaped his existing material—and the extent to which he was prepared to abandon that effort.

In a 1967 article on Flaubert, Roland Barthes sets the limitations to revision as belonging to two primary ‘axes’ of a process he calls ‘correction’—a residuum of a critical consensus

\(^{18}\) Four dates appear in succession in the Blue Book: ‘jan 65’, ‘jan 65’, ‘jan 65’, and ‘satisfactory july ’65’ (Blue Book 1:269, 287, 288, 302). Whitman was recovering from ill-health at his mother’s house in Brooklyn from the summer of 1864 to Jan 1865 when many of these notes are written (see Coviello, “Introduction” in Coviello [ed.] *Memoranda*, xxi-xxii).

\(^{19}\) Walt Whitman to Louisa Van Velsor Whitman, 31 March 1863 in Folsom and Price (eds.) *The Walt Whitman Archive*, accessed 10 December 2017. Available online at http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/loc.00765.html. In total, the Blue Book was out of Whitman’s possession for about a year.
that sees revision as an improvement. ‘The corrections writers make on their manuscripts,’ Barthes writes,

may be readily classified according to the two axes of the paper on which they write; on the vertical axis are made the substitutions of words (these are the crossings out or “hesitations”); on the horizontal axis, the suppressions or additions of syntagms (these are the “recastings”).

These expansive coordinates of revision are enacted in the manuscript by annotation—the drift of a pen or pencil over a page. What I have been calling ‘authorial revision’ (the revision of text by the putative author of that text) is, in the case of the Blue Book, the creation of annotations. Whitman, of course, annotates the Blue Book; he does not create a readerly or published final version of its revised text. Annotations are not finished poems; they are, rather, a set of instructions for future poems, a blueprint for which an editor, typesetter, or poet are to construct a new text. As Dirk Van Hulle has explained, manuscripts are not a finalized text in themselves but ‘a protocol for the creation of a text’. It is the later auditor who interprets these instructions to assemble a poem whose eventual contours the poet did not construct. Revision, then, may be fruitfully considered as the elaboration of a link or genetic connection between texts—the initiating text and its annotations—rather than the creation of a new text, well-formed and complete in itself.

In an article on annotation, Derrida (perhaps unsurprisingly) keeps the terms of annotation and text circumscribed within their relation, arguing that annotation ‘consists, in effect, of a text related to another text that has meaning only within the relationship.’ Unable to be disentangled, the flow of one textual state into another draws a special connection between these states—a bond only apparently dissolved or assimilated in the following edition. According to Laurent Mayali, this is a relation less of meaning than of power. ‘The annotation,’ Mayali asserts, is ‘a procedure of political appropriation of the power of the text;

20 Roland Barthes, “Flaubert and the Sentence”, in Susan Sontag (ed.) A Roland Barthes Reader (London: Vintage, 2000), 298. Barthes continues by arguing that “[a]s we cannot replace a sign by just any other sign, we also cannot reduce a sentence indefinitely; the diminutive correction (ellipsis) eventually comes up against the irreducible cell of any sentence, the subject-predicate group […] ellipsis is limited by the structure of language” (299). It should be noted that Barthes sees this way of organising revisions as imposing a restrictive order onto the text where now it is limitless in the form and activity of the sentence.

21 Van Hulle, Modern Manuscripts, 11. Van Hulle is here describing the work of the textual geneticist Daniel Ferrer.

it is an apparatus of reproducing knowledge in a form that legitimates the annotator, the annotation, and the social structures within which they exist.'²³ Judicious glossator of his own work, Whitman becomes a commentator on himself—the manuscript transformed into a repository of a Civil War-period Whitman commenting on (and forcefully reshaping) an antebellum Whitman. Once a supplement, the annotations are absorbed after publication as if there had been no annotation at all; the later Whitman, successful in revision, is allowed to predominate. But when paused before their incorporation into a published text, the annotations (if the manuscript they inhabit survives) resist that dissolution. Strands of text, not yet resolved into a new text, remain visible and only jaggedly incorporated. The comparison between the original printed text and its annotatory amendments becomes not only the differential between extant editions but between handwritten annotations inscribed on top of, within, and around the revised line itself. In the manuscript revision of print, the machine-generated under-text is responsive to the handwritten lines that crowd it; it too is reshaped in the process of revision and not simply replaced by the annotations.

These abundant inscriptions reveal the Blue Book as a palimpsest. Where a traditional palimpsest is a ‘manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing’ (OED), this may be expanded to include what we find in the Blue Book: later writing superimposed on uneffaced (though obscured) mechanically printed text. In the Blue Book, this stratification or interlacing of peritextual annotations exposes the artefact as a particularly extended and intricate palimpsest. Texts from various times, in various directions, are inscribed over others so that they share space customarily reserved for a single string of characters. This closeness of contact has been described by Sarah Dillon as ‘palimpsestuous’—a portmanteau word that draws on the ‘myth that it is illegitimate to have a relationship between individuals who are too closely related’—they are thought to require ‘a certain estrangement’ in order to function.²⁴ To think of the stratification of revision is to think about the figure of the palimpsest in which texts are so closely inscribed that they become a kind of provocation. While Dillon is more concerned with the metaphor of the palimpsest rather than texts themselves, George Bornstein notes that the palimpsest is ‘less a bearer of a fixed final inscription than a site of the process of inscription, in which acts of composition and transmission occur before our eyes.’²⁵ These inscriptive processes mark the Blue Book with an almost archaeological depth. Between lost

drafts revisions may be undetectable, but in the form of annotations they accumulate in successive layers. Text, then, must be dug out or mined from the artefact; the activity of reading requires an active process of disentanglement. As Whitman’s friend John Burroughs writes in a biographical pamphlet co-written (or revised) with Whitman and issued in 1867: ‘[Leaves was a] series of growths, or strata, rising or starting out from a settled foundation or centre and expanding in successive accumulations.’

These ‘accumulations’ may be usefully viewed through the lens of what Robert Leigh Davis has traced as the ‘possibility of intermingled states’ which he calls ‘the political ideal of Whitman’s poetry’. ‘[B]urred and intermingled boundaries,’ according to Davis, are the ‘space of Whitman’s romance’. Whitman ‘oscillates between fixed states’ and ‘construes that oscillation as a positive value, the shared, unstable ground of poetry, democracy, and convalescence.’ The Blue Book is a material embodiment of such an oscillation: the boundaries between print-text and annotation—and between annotation and further annotation—remain indisputably blurred and intermingled. Text snakes and knots inconclusively in the Blue Book. The original text of an early 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass is not effaced as a part of the process of inscription: it remains at least mostly legible. What draws our attention is the supplemental text that enlivens it—the unauthorised, erratic annotations—that are central to its significance as a manuscript. Revisions are inscribed onto the object so its status as a palimpsest—an artefact containing texts with a spatial uniformity but a temporal differential—enables an idea of the multiple layers of revision, manipulable into patterns.

This palimpsestic (and palimpsestuous) quality of Whitman’s manuscripts becomes more pronounced in one notable aspect: the added paper slips glued throughout the Blue Book. Known variously as ‘paste-ons’, ‘paste-ins’, ‘inserts’ or occasionally ‘paste-overs’, these attached paper scraps materially enrich the book by further multiplying textual layers. Similar to a standard page they are double-sided and involve lifting to unveil what is beneath. But they differ from a familiar bound page not only in their size and shape but also in authority: they obscure text hidden below. What the paste-on covers or obscures it also reveals as an uncertain attempt at erasure. Frequently disguising previous text, they signal a kind of ephemerality, a makeshift solution for too much revising. One aspect of poetic revision is the rather banal fact of poems usually taking up less page space than prose—the larger margins

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26 John Burroughs, quoted in Marrs, Nineteenth-Century American, 40.
28 Ibid., 3.
enabling a larger free area for annotations. This usually gives Whitman ample space in which to revise but at times the margin is full or insufficient and the poet inserts a paste-on. Composed of old or found content and marked with irrelevant material inscribed in conflicting directions, paste-ons of any size are habitually folded into packets that require unravelling—the text itself disguised within its own layers. In conversation with Edward Carpenter, Whitman hints at ‘truths which it is necessary to envelop or wrap up.’\(^{29}\) The paste-on exemplifies this necessity. Often written in the permanency of ink they are regularly blotted, folded, smudged, or incomplete—commanding attention over the elder text by being physically placed over it. Sometimes an artefact of final intention, they are scraps of other texts inserted as a kind of recycled waste product; they are fragments that require gluing-in.

Paste-ons function in the Blue Book as unofficial torn or shrunken pages, ephemeral, out of sequence, reduced or irregular in size, bearing instructions for text to be added but physically laid over the lines they are to replace. The Blue Book’s facsimile edition editor, Arthur Golden, very often notes added paper slips that are ‘written in a clear, even hand, [that] were apparently copied from some lost intermediate draft’ (see, for example, Blue Book II:81)—indicating that some or most of them were likely revised before they were inserted, their earlier revisions lost. Signalling on occasion where an absent paste-on has left a tell-tale patch of glue, Golden posits that the missing scrap may have fallen out or been torn out—perhaps by Whitman or by an unknown third party. This raises the possibility of other added slips not so robustly pasted-in that have been lost. The Blue Book’s paste-ons, then, afford a further stratum for revision to work within, not only at the level of intended insertions but by lost or accidental ones.

**Lead, Ink, and Glue: The Types of Revision**

Whitman’s Blue Book annotations generally begin with a pencilled line. A grey stroke is drawn across the printed page, reworking text into a lattice of lines. Sections of poems are excised, text is interlined and jotted in the margins, connected by curving lines, broken up, fused, erased, reinserted and reworked many times over. ‘In adding, deleting, interlineating, repositioning, and renaming poems and entire groups of poems,’ Michael Moon has written, ‘Whitman effectively redirected the patterns of meaning in each of the successive editions of *Leaves of Grass.*’\(^{30}\) In the Blue Book, Whitman redirects more than simply the text of certain


\(^{30}\) Moon, *Disseminating*, 1.
verses; he creates an apparatus for the rearrangement of the book’s contents as a whole. From guidelines to strikethroughs, paste-ons to printing notes, Whitman’s Blue Book revisions register a revisory process at the scale of the book rather than exclusively at the level of a poem or line.

The Blue Book represents a series of experiments in re-composition. The annotations that cover it form a kind of scaffold or instruction set in which to enact these changes. Whitman confidently (and perhaps gleefully) removes text; adds text; checks it; excises it; checks again; adds more. Fragments on paper slips composed elsewhere are dutifully stuck in. The magnitude of alternative material inserted in the Blue Book marks the restless exertion and experimental hesitance of the manuscript. Until marginal space is full and a paste-on attached, Whitman continues to add and remove as much content as he pleases. His process, it seems, is at the outset reductive, then accretive, then, finally, reductive once again. The Blue Book revisions, if published as a full edition, would have been the first and only version of *Leaves of Grass* shorter than its predecessor. In the June 1857 letter to Sarah Tyndale, Whitman boasts of the expanding size of *Leaves*. And yet in the Blue Book, he cuts more than he adds. Barthes’s ‘diminutive’ process of manuscript correction is Whitman’s primary mode of revision—cutting or striking text in the manner of the rhetorical mode of ‘ellipsis’ (cutting) rather than expanding it by ‘catalysis’ (addition). This excess of deletion produces a kind of folding where groups of lines press against those to which they would not otherwise adjoin. Trial text and printed text clash and fuse, the excised lines allowing two sections to (seamlessly, if printed) press against each other in novel ways.

The innumerable annotations inscribed throughout the Blue Book are of various classes and functions. They are handwritten, packed together and inscribed over each other, they are in large and small letters, in lines of various thickness—some clear, some illegible, some erased. All of them, except for some front-matter notes, are in Whitman’s hand. They are not, as may be suspected, limited to lexical amendments but contain guidelines in many lengths and widths, asterisks, ticks, and even illustrations—limited, though, to manicules of various shapes and sizes:

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31 In his article on manuscript revisions, Roland Barthes calls *all erasures* ‘hesitations’. See Barthes, “Flaubert and the Sentence”, 298.
32 Walt Whitman to Sarah Tyndale, 30 June 1857 in *Corr.*, I:44.
In the Blue Book, most revisions appear to be at their heaviest in “Proto-Leaf” and “Chants Democratic” 1 as well as in the “Calamus” and “Enfans D’Adam” clusters. This heaviness of annotation is dramatically counterpointed in sections of the book in which poems are allowed to stand with barely a pencilled line marking them. “Sleep-Chasings”, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”, “Poem of the Road”, “To the Sayers of Words”, and “Salut au Monde!” have little or no annotations. One possibility for what links these unrevised poems is that they do not bear directly on a vision of a unified nation. These poems delineate a cosmic, global, spiritual or urban space rather than an overtly national one. While there is little distinction between these spheres in Whitman’s work, if the line or poem directly evokes a national or military order then there is a demonstrable increase in revision. When a page or cluster of lines is left alone by Whitman the absence of revision becomes evidence of an at least provisional satisfactoriness.34

In the Blue Book, Whitman utilizes every available space to add textual supplements. Writing of the ways in which Whitman was a creator of books and not just a writer of them, Ed Folsom has observed that in the wartime composition of much of Drum-Taps, Whitman composed and constructed the ‘book during a time of paper shortage’ so that ‘the very composition of the pages reflects his desire to use every inch of space.’35 The Blue Book, fashioned during the same period of scarcity, reproduces this frugality. Annotations are added along margins, at the head and feet of pages, between or within lines, and in the unused flyleaves. Usually taking one of four forms, these annotations may remain: 1) preserved as inserted; 2) inserted and then cancelled; 3) inserted and entirely erased; or 4) inserted and removed so as to restore the original wording.36 If the annotated passage or poem does not

34 In a paste-on appended to “A Word Out of the Sea” (retitled as “The Word of the Sea”) Whitman circles a note that reads: ‘Jan ’65 | This is satisfactory | as it is W’ (Blue Book I:269). On the title page of “Enfans d’Adam” Whitman notes ‘Enfans adam | all satisfactory — Jan ’65’ (Blue Book I:287). Similarly, in “Enfans d’Adam” 2, Whitman writes ‘satisfactory Jan ’65’ (Blue Book I:288). In the Blue Book, the poet’s reworking may be seen in some way as an attempt to achieve such a state of satisfactoriness.


36 In Golden’s edition of the Blue Book, each of these annotatory types has its own set of symbols in the textual apparatus (see Blue Book II:429).
come to some kind of satisfactory state, the poet-annotator puts a line through it, adds a marginal note for its deletion, block-cancels the entire passage, or does all three:

![Figure 3](image3.png)

**Figure 3.** Block cancellations combined with individual line strike-throughs and a marginal note for deletion (detail) (Blue Book 151). The Walt Whitman Archive.

In some of the sequentially later poems, Whitman skips this intermediate revisory phase of lexical substitution and moves straight to striking-through the entire section. “Calamus” 8, for example, is crossed-through in its entirety with no other revisions:

![Figure 4](image4.png)

**Figure 4.** Whitman’s block cancellations with no prior revisions (detail) (Blue Book 354). The Walt Whitman Archive.

As Price has observed, these strikethroughs are not as unproblematic as they seem. Whitman’s manuscript annotations, he writes, ‘suggest that a vertical line through a passage is often an ambiguous mark’, that

sometimes Whitman uses it to mark something for deletion, but at other times he is not rejecting a passage but instead marking it as “used” or “completed.” That is, a vertical strike through functions, at times, as some people use a check mark.\(^{37}\)

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37 Kenneth M. Price, “The Lost Negress of “Song of Myself” and the Jolly Young Wenches of Civil War Washington”, in Belasco et al (eds.) *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 242 n.8. To my knowledge, no scholar has taken the Blue Book strikethroughs as
This lends an ambiguity to Whitman’s vertical strikes: what appear as cancellations may in fact be marks noting a completion to the revisory process. Though read here as cancellations, this constant insertion and removal of text gives the book a matted or clotted appearance. So many pencil marks are drawn throughout it, so many overhanging leaves of pasted-in paper hang from its pages they often resemble a discordant labyrinth of lines rather than a readable set of instructions.

The most common revision found in the Blue Book is not, as may be supposed, the reworking of lexical content but is instead the modification of punctuation. An edition that Whitman once described as typographically ‘odd’ has its typography thoroughly reworked.\(^\text{38}\)

One of the most common revisions in the manuscript is the erasure and replacement of terminal punctuation. Whitman habitually adds commas to empty line endings or turns commas into semicolons, usually in the catalogues:

![Figure 5. Cancellations of terminal commas replaced by semicolons (detail) (Blue Book 31). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

The famous, often-quoted line group beginning ‘Do I contradict myself?’ is given its first semi-colon in the Blue Book—a revision that would persist through the next two editions:

![Figure 6. A barely-legible semi-colon is added in “Walt Whitman” (detail) (Blue Book 103). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

This substitution end-stops lines with more finality than the slightly more run-on comma. Whitman’s long-drawn locutions, almost breathless in their expansiveness, are here given a more sententious heaviness—a weight to hasten their downward slope to conclusion. These
designating the completion of a passage—treating them, in effect, as if the marked passage was left unrevised—though much interesting work could be done on the basis of this assumption.

\(^{38}\) Walt Whitman to Thomas Jefferson Whitman, 10 May 1860 in *Corr.*, I:52.
reworkings extend to different punctuation types. In one instruction in “Salut au Monde!” Whitman writes himself a note to leave ‘commas only’ (Blue Book I:247)—in the process cutting the dashes strewn throughout the poem. In the sensuous record of the printed page, a dash enables a certain stretching of the line, a pause for its extension. A comma, on the other hand, attends a briefer pause, a quick alteration in pacing. These may seem minor but, like the removal of the extended ellipses of the first edition, Whitman’s changes to punctuation have wide-ranging implications for his verse. The Blue Book, as Price observes, ‘can be regarded as the hinge on which Whitman turns toward his late style. We can see this in many ways, including such a seemingly small matter as a change in his use of parentheses.’

In reworking punctuation, a poem’s pulse or irregular beat is given reduced or inflated pauses, speeding or slowing a reading. The appearance of the words on the page—what Northrop Frye has called opsis, the look of a poem—is not as populated with dashes, their almost clasp-like tying of clauses supplanted by the shorter, less obtrusive comma. In the Blue Book, Whitman not only alters the verbal content of his writing but reengineers the mechanism of his verse. The poems’ rhythms and appearance as printed objects are all thoroughly revised—textual features central to a poet so involved in the printing process.

This reduction of pauses within a line group is counteracted by the frequent separation of lines into two smaller units. Golden remarks that it is one of Whitman’s ‘standard practices in the Blue Book,’ that of ‘dividing a long line into two and altering terminal punctuation’ (Blue Book II:10). In two pages of “Burial” alone (a nine-page poem), there are twenty-one lines marked for separation (Blue Book I:442-3). Line spacing is indicated by the addition of a pilcrow (¶) to the prospective break:

![Figure 7. Prospective line divisions in “Proto-Leaf” (detail) (Blue Book 16). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

This division makes breath pauses more frequent in the rhythm of a line group by shortening an individual line’s length. With far fewer words bundled up into a line, the Blue Book tests a reversal of a signature dimension of Whitmanian versifying. By dividing his radically long lines into shorter ones, Whitman conventionalizes his verse, suppressing the old unconcern

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for lyric reduction. While of course not superior to other verse forms, Whitman’s characteristically vast line lengths are curtailed here into shorter bursts: they become more polished or lapidary, less garrulous. The flexibility of a Whitmanian long line is pushed to its maximum: often no modification of the divided section is made with each part being allowed to stand in its original shape. By dividing lines in this way, Whitman not only expands the spatial distance between them—shrinking their reach across a page—but supplements the length of the volume. Perhaps aware that removing so much text would reduce the book’s size—a set of comparative word totals are jotted in the flyleaf for reference (Blue Book I:4)—Whitman divided them, extending their proportions and allowing the original number of pages to be retained.

Line divisions are then supplemented with a train of changes in line numbering, capitalisation, titling, parentheses, and terminal vowels. In a rarer set of revisions, the line group numbering in the left margin of “Walt Whitman” is dutifully clipped with the original struck-through and the amended figure added (also note the unnumbered group shifted up to be made number ‘263’):

This process is repeated (again, only rarely) for amended titles. For example, the “Leaves of Grass” that heads the introductory poem is renamed “Starting from Paumanok” (Blue Book I:13). Of the sixteen pages of “Salut au Monde!”, some six of the recto pages—again titled with “Leaves of Grass”—are struck-through in blue pencil and replaced with the appropriate title (Blue Book I:243-258). In contrast to the infrequency of these changes, Whitman habitually inserts parentheses. Most of these are added in accepted positions while others pause and sink a line in surprising ways:
In these two lines, the parentheses mark an abrupt break with the rolling line they transform—the speaking voice edging closer and then awkwardly turning aside. While Cavitch surprisingly maintains that a parenthetical in Whitman ‘almost always’ means an aggressive assertion, the poet seems to use parentheses, as many poets do, to convey a sense of intimacy, a dropping of the speaking voice to a private register, a telling directly to ‘you’ (a principal figure of Leaves). For Price,

the parenthetical remark often conveys the essence of what is at stake in a poem, a re-articulation of its issues in another register, tone, or voice. Rather than conveying the least important information, the parentheses often convey the most important meaning.

This movement between speaking voices neatly supplements Jonathan Culler’s notion of ‘triangulated address’. A method of ‘speaking to listeners through an apostrophic address to an absent power’, Whitman speaks to (and listens as) himself but in a way that is spread out through time. The composer of verses writes to a future Whitman who overhears his own address and revises accordingly. While Whitman doesn’t always or even often address himself, this ubiquitous ‘you’—as capacious as his multitudinous ‘I’—is here at work as Whitman himself. In a 1969 prologue to Leaves of Grass, lifelong admirer and translator of the poet, Jorge Luis Borges, writes that in Whitman’s verse ‘the changing and successive

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41 Cavitch, American Elegy, 261.
42 Price, “Love, War and Revision”, 687. Price goes on to suggest that ‘Whitman may have relied heavily on parentheses at this time because he regarded the Civil War itself as a parenthetical moment—a break from normalcy in the national history—and a clarifying realization of American purpose and ideals’.
43 Culler, Theory of the Lyric, 15.
reader’ blends into the ‘strange creature’ who speaks. In this instance, that character is a future Whitman, a reader and tinkerer of *Leaves*, modifying the ingenious invention of ‘Walt Whitman’ not only for the delectation of a future audience but for a Whitman to come. The annotator, Ralph Hanna III grandly declares, ‘is in fact creating himself as reader – and thus creating the reader of his work.’ Revision, as will be seen, works not only to fulfil a future but also to modify the past.

In Blodgett and Bradley’s 1965 *Comprehensive Reader’s Edition*, a footnote indicates that ‘[d]uring the later period, Whitman’s revisions of the new composition showed a characteristic elision of the unvoiced “e” in the terminal “ed” of past-tense verbs and verbals.’ In the Blue Book, Whitman began a serious restructuring of poetic contractions. This elision of vowels—known as syncope—was popular in English poetry from the early modern period to the eighteenth century. It extends from the removal of the e in ‘bloom’d’ to the insertion of a ‘t’ for the terminal ‘ed’ so that ‘cool-breathed’ becomes ‘cool-breath’t’ and ‘accomplished’ becomes ‘accomplisht’ (Blue Book 1:381, 394). Like Edmund Spenser or Thomas Chatterton or John Berryman, Whitman appears impressed by visual affectations. These revisions have the effect of shifting *Leaves* to conform with somewhat dated contemporary views on verse formatting (elided vowels may have appeared a little outmoded to mid-nineteenth-century readers) as well as making the book appear visually antique. In “Proto-Leaf”, Whitman writes of this impulse for the ‘antique’:

In the name of These States, shall I scorn the antique?
Why These are the children of the antique, to justify it.

(LG 1860:9)

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This antiquating of *Leaves*—perhaps beginning with the use of the long s for ‘s’ in the 1860 edition’s “Europe, The 72d and 73d Years of Thefe States” (LG 1860:283)—is not extended in Whitman’s use of capitalisations, a rather more eighteenth-century habit. Along with the esteemed appearance of age, the poet’s typographical changes also emphasise or exalt. In “Calamus” 2, for example, Whitman enhances a reference to mere ‘life’ into an exorbitant “Life” (Blue Book I:343-4). In the slave auction section of “Enfans D’Adam” 3, the word ‘body’ is changed to ‘Body’ (Blue Book I:297-300)—the annotator stressing the intrinsic beauty and capacity of the auctioned slaves’ bodies by repeatedly capitalizing the word’s initial B. In “Walt Whitman”, the Blue Book also records a shift from the lowercase initials of ‘north’ and ‘south’ (as well as ‘northerner’ and ‘southerner’) to a more updated ‘North’ and ‘South’—an adjustment made in blue pencil and triple underlined in the margins (see Blue Book I:44).

In a few instances, Whitman moves in the opposite direction: shifting capitalized initials to lower case. In “Walt Whitman”, both of these revisory practices are active. The words ‘He’ and ‘Night’ are altered to ‘he’ and ‘night’ with two instances of ‘night’ in the final line transformed into ‘Night’ (note the cancelled ‘N’ in the left margin):

![Figure 10](image-url)  

In this passage, Whitman also cuts the post-exclamation capital ‘M’ from ‘Mad’ in the final line—removing a more modern typographical quirk, not as often found in the nineteenth century. Whitman both courts (in assuming the authority of the past) and repels (in the excessive use of these quirks) a contemporary audience in his typographical changes. A ‘fluid text’, John Bryant observes,

bodies forth concrete instances of an idiosyncratic individual negotiating idiosyncratically with an audience. Such idiosyncrasies cannot represent a culture, but

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48 Michael Moon has described the capitalized form of the word *Body* as ‘the text’s name for the power the person holds in his or her body to override the culture’s systematic and categorical devaluations of bodiliness’ (see Moon, *Disseminating*, 131).
as a particularized instance of cultural engagement, they may be seen in their peculiarity as a concrete enactment of a culture.⁴⁹

Whitman’s typographical changes enact a negotiation with the tumultuous period in which he revised. ‘The annotator,’ Hanna remarks, ‘is controlled by the same assumptions as the audience he addresses; he allows the audience to stipulate the accepted form his annotations take. Yet, simultaneously the way he fills those forms in effect reconstitutes the audience of which he is a member’.⁵⁰ The Blue Book, in line from every edition beyond the first, continues the contradictory tradition of remaking *Leaves of Grass* as both more unconventional and more palatable for a broader market by antiquating its text in ways that would continue through future editions—a negotiation made urgent by the violent divisions of the Civil War. As stated above, in no other time was the intimate democratic nationality announced in *Leaves* more vital than during the fatal divisions of war.

Some of Whitman’s most extensive revisory energy is directed at the reworking of titles. As Golden has observed, it ‘was characteristic of Whitman throughout the Blue Book to retain the first line of the text as his trial title’ (Blue Book II:5). This can be seen in, for example, “Leaves of Grass” 2 (known later as “Great Are the Myths”) where the first half of the first line ‘Great are the myths – I too delight in them’ is placed above the body of the poem as a title, both signalling its content and conventionalizing its appearance (Blue Book I:199). But Whitman’s reworking of titles in the Blue Book is much more comprehensive than Golden allows. Each of the numbered poems in the “Chants Democratic”, “Calamus”, “Leaves of Grass” and “Enfans d’Adam” clusters—totalling over one hundred poems—are given an individual title, most drawn from first lines. The process of assigning a new title is, of course, fraught with revision. In “A Word Out Of The Sea”, for example, the title, difficult to isolate from the revised first line, is rewritten multiple times (including more on two inserted paste-ons), the original 1860 title struck-through with pencil trails clustering about it:

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⁵⁰ Ralph Hanna III, “Annotation as Social Practice”, 184. Hanna is here discussing scholarly annotation but many of his arguments are still applicable to the authorial annotations of the Blue Book.
Amid this abundance of annotation, “Prelude” is perhaps indicated as a title, or subtitle—the oceanic language of the many-trialled ‘sea-lips’ vanishing into the first line. The almost comically jaunty trial title for “A Boston Ballad”—“To get betimes in Boston town, I rose this morning early”—was similarly cancelled from future editions (Blue Book I:337). In the miscellaneous collection of poetic fragments called “Debris” that are rather infelicitously renamed “Leaves-droppings” (a title perhaps wisely cancelled in the 1867 edition), the poet adds new titles to the untitled, even numbering seven of them under the new section title “Fantoccini” (a type of puppet or puppet-show) which is then cancelled for “Figures”:

In changing the titles of the poems—and giving titles to the merely numbered—Whitman alters how he presents his poems to a public. In the process, the poet is reshaping the text’s intended reception by a wider audience—what D.C. Greetham has described as ‘a control of textual dissemination’. Like a preface, titles are in themselves a kind of revision to material already written; they revise the text they introduce. Titles shape and reshape material that

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51 Greetham, *Theories of the Text*, 137.
follows it; they encompass the poem or cluster or book as a whole, circumscribing or delineating its contours and modifying how the proceeding lines are to be received—a sort of signpost for the content to follow. While a constant practice of the author, the fact that so many poems from this period have new trial titles tells of a willingness to not only reshape material they introduce but to provide a clearer set of instructions for readers to navigate a new edition—the poet embracing an even broader audience.

These changes to the punctuation, placing, length, and content of a line rework not only the book’s semantic content but also its intricate systems of rhythm, its patterns of sound. In conversation with Traubel, Whitman notes:

I am very deliberate—I take a good deal of trouble with words: yes, a good deal: but what I am after is the content not the music of words. Perhaps the music happens—it does no harm: I do not go in search of it.53

While it is clearly disingenuous (as Gay Wilson Allen indicates) for a poet to proclaim a lack of interest in the ‘music of words’, Peter Coviello has argued that the music of the poet’s words is their content.54 By their very ‘verbal texture’, Whitman is able to create not only an instantly recognizable style but the forms of ‘intimate nationality’ he intends.55 Ed Folsom, in writing of the postwar “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”, argues that ‘Whitman tended to embrace conventional metric and rhyme schemes at times when he felt acute social instability’.56 In the Blue Book, we find hints of this embrace: the addition of verse contractions, the capitalisations, the line spacings, and the experiments in titling during perhaps the most unstable period of his career.

Whitman’s constant reworking of the mechanism of his verse—and the sense-making dimensions of the book—give the impression of an over-all revisory plan, a clear design according to which the war and a possible fourth edition may be understood. On the copyright page, four ‘words or phrases’ are given prominence by being proposed to be ‘put in German text, either wherever they occur, or in pronounced situations: “divine average” “the unknown” | Democracy | the Soul’ (Blue Book I:2)—a typographical change not pursued in

53 Traubel, With Walt Whitman, 1:163.
the fourth edition. Unsurprisingly, the Blue Book revisions may not be so easily divided into these key terms. The patterns of Whitman’s revising are, needless to say, infused with far more uncertainty. In her study of the Classical poet Ovid’s revisions, Francesca Martelli declares that Ovid, evidently rare in the ancient world, revises ‘not always with a view toward improvement’ but ‘often for the sake of revision.’ While Whitman does not appear to be engaging in this level of revisory freedom, more than a few of the Blue Book’s revisions are marked by a certain arbitrariness. Whitman appears unwavering in his willingness to rework a passage or a poem. Barely a revision is implemented before it is itself revised. If the oxymoron is bearable, Whitman is unhesitating in his hesitations. Like his contemporary Flaubert, a varying and evidently ceaseless struggle with words and their ordering characterize the reworkings.

Many of Whitman’s Blue Book annotations show signs of this struggle: there are literal question marks over poems; ideas emphasized in one place are excised elsewhere; notes indicating ‘trans[fer] somewhere else’ or ‘trans[fer] to another poem’ litter the manuscript with no indication of final ordering; a baffling array of revisory trajectories are pursued. The idea, then, that Whitman is in total control of his revising should be taken with some degree of caution. Since any one modification may itself be modified, each revision, each line or word, is likewise provisional. In all revision there resides some form of equivocation, a persistent hedging about of alternatives. In the Blue Book, there is little immediately textual that is not susceptible to revision; there is no hard core to Leaves of Grass impervious to what Shakespeare called ‘new pride’. ‘What his extensive work of revision, excision, and addition indicates,’ Erkkila summarizes, ‘is not [Whitman’s] desire to retreat from the radical posture of his earlier Leaves but, rather the renewed sense of artistic calling he had gained during the Civil War.’ A thematic connection between the Blue Book revisions and the Civil War will be the focus of the following two chapters.

57 For Whitman’s rather arbitrary revising, see the removal of six precise trees from a list of seventeen (Blue Book I:112); the removal and replacement of five birds from a list of eight (Blue Book I:113); the shift in the weight of an ideal American man from ‘a hundred and eighty pounds’ to ‘a hundred and ninety pounds’, his height and breadth from ‘six feet high, forty inches round the breast and neck’ to ‘forty-two inches round’ (Blue Book I:141). In one of the few uses of red pencil in the book, Whitman highlights the word ‘sniffling’ in the phrase ‘the dog’s snout sniffing for garbage’ and changes it to ‘sniffing’ (Blue Book I:279).
58 Martelli, Ovid’s Revisions, 4.
59 For an example of this view, see Blodgett and Bradley “Introduction” in Blodgett and Bradley (eds.) Comprehensive Reader’s Edition, xxxi.
60 Erkkila, Political Poet, 250-1.
CHAPTER TWO

‘Rising Over the Carnage’: Battles, Soldiers, Mothers

Thus cried the Phantasmic voice, rising over the carnage,
rising over the dead I in anguish mourn.

—Whitman, Blue Book

Drawing on an old literary myth of heroic combat, Whitman was always in some way a singer of war. Ranging from the editorials of the 1840s to the publication of the first edition, the textual supplement of patriotic warfare—usually in reference to the Revolutionary period or the Mexican war—ripples through the poet’s work. In a notebook poem jotted around 1854 or 1855, the poet is portrayed as a ‘recruiter’, stirring up followers:

The poet is a recruiter
He goes forth beating
the drum,—O, who
will not join his troop?

In another early notebook, Whitman announces the soldier’s enlivening ability: ‘I buoy you up | Every room of your house do I fill with armed men’. In drafting these initial fragments, the poet infuses his poetry with the presence and activities of armies. In the first edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman references battles, battlefields, and the soldiers caught up in conflict, all ringing with living detail. In this edition alone the persona famously approaches ‘some great battlefield’, passes ‘the colossal outposts of the encampments’, witnesses ‘the fall of the Alamo’, is told of an ‘oldfashioned frigate-fight’ in which two vessels do battle, and becomes ‘an old artillerist’ who both tells of, and is present at, ‘some fort’s bombardment’. In “Chants Democratic” 1, from the 1860 edition, Whitman reworks an already-revised section of the 1855 Preface that enumerates the qualities of an ideal American poet. ‘In war,’ he writes, ‘he is the best backer of the war —he fetches artillery as good as the engineer’s — he can make every word he speaks draw blood’ (LG 1860:116).

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1 Walt Whitman, in Moon (ed.) Leaves of Grass, 609.
2 Walt Whitman, quoted in Miller, Collage of Myself, 151.
3 Walt Whitman, in Kaplan (ed.) Complete Poetry, 38, 40-1, 66. Further citations from this edition will be given parenthetically in-text as LG 1855.
Neatly coupling with the persona’s declaration in “Proto-Leaf”—‘I too go to the wars’ (LG 1860:11)—these lines reveal a poet in preparation for battle and instilled with a willingness to weave it into poetry. In the Blue Book’s front flyleaves, this preoccupation with armed combat is foreshadowed in the inscription of a series of word-count correspondences to compare with the poet’s Leaves—listing, significantly, the Iliad (an epic of heroic combat) and the Aeneid (an epic of a defeated soldier) among an array of famous books (Blue Book I:4). Like almost every other revisory pattern traceable in the Blue Book, this prefiguring of war is not so much generated in the annotated pages of the manuscript but, rather, emphasised. The Blue Book revisions rarely add wholly new content to the 1860 text but instead heighten or attenuate themes already embedded within it.

During the Civil War, Whitman’s experiences of ministering to wounded soldiers—some eighty thousand to one hundred thousand by his reckoning—further emphasise the soldier’s intimate erotic presence and sacrifice for democracy. In the hospitals, Whitman’s role was one of salubrious presence, a persistent closeness of amorous contact that nourished as it drew the wounded together. Imparting a touch or a kiss for the dying, the poet would give a last comforting word and hand-press to the injured soldier suffering (and dying) alongside him. At once movingly utopic and unsettlingly violent, Whitman’s immense poetic undertaking is reshaped during the Civil War to emphasise a military character. War and soldiers, once peripheral to Leaves of Grass, become heightened during this period.

As discussed above, the addition of Drum-Taps—its sheets physically sewn in to the 1867 edition—marks the moment when the Civil War is often seen as officially fusing with Leaves. During the war, the Blue Book becomes a source for material marked for insertion into the collection. Poems and line groups are crossed through with a vertical stroke, a note signalling a ‘tr[ansfer] to Drum Taps’:

![Figure 13](image-url)

In total, some seven poems in their entirety and one line group from “Calamus” 5 are marked

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4 In the Blue Book, this line is supplemented with the portentous phrase ‘Be not deceived’ and a paragraph marker inserted after the second dash (Blue Book I:116).
for inclusion in *Drum-Taps*.\(^5\) As Martin Klammer has noted, by transferring lines or poems into *Drum-Taps*, they become transformed into artefacts of Civil War experience.\(^6\) The two books share a parallel course of revision: text flows from the Blue Book into *Drum-Taps* which is then fused back into *Leaves of Grass* as the revised cluster “Drum-Taps” in 1867. This simultaneous composition of *Drum-Taps* and its *Sequel*, together with the hospital notebooks and the Blue Book revisions, shows a surprising disparity in content. The wartime notebooks are filled with fragmentary lists of soldiers: details of their lives, their wounds, their longing to write home to loved-ones, their affection for life-giving Walt. In the Blue Book, these same soldiers are oddly vague, without the loving details of living men.

This chapter describes the alternately careful and blunt intertwining of the language of warfare with this unique copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*. In the process, Whitman infuses into the Blue Book the bloodshed so dominant in American culture during the Civil War. These revisions also mark the simultaneous insertion of the figure of the soldier, populating the book with loving comrades. ‘Revision,’ Moon observes, ‘is inextricably related to [Whitman’s] commitment to representing the body and sexuality, especially sexuality between and among males, in his writing.’\(^7\) This revisory process culminates in an excursion to the antebellum figure of the Democratic Mother who, rather than being merely a symbol of sentimental patriotism, becomes similarly militarized. Like the soldiers who pervade the book, the figure becomes ‘weapon’d’, only to be transformed in revision into a formless ‘warlike One’. While Whitman’s experiences of, and responses to, the Civil War are varied, I will be focusing here on the insertion of a discourse of combat or warfare to show how the war’s most immediate appearances were threaded with the Blue Book as it unravelled.

**‘Bloody Vindictive Battles’: The Annotated War**

‘In revising the Blue Book at the time of his emotional experiences during the war,’ Gay Wilson Allen observes, ‘Whitman inserted references to them’.\(^8\) But the Blue Book offers much more than a few mere references: it stores a language of war and soldiery unprecedented in earlier editions. Often this consists in inserting the word ‘war’, or ‘warlike’,

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\(^5\) In his *Textual Analysis* volume, Golden notes that “Apostroph”, “Chants Democratic” 11, and “Enfans d’Adam” 10 are finally included in *Drum-Taps*; “Chants Democratic” 9 is rejected; and “Europe, The 72nd and 73rd Years of These States” is marked as a tentative inclusion. Lines 1-15 of “Calamus” 5 become “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice” (Blue Book II:412-14).


\(^7\) Moon, *Disseminating*, vii.

or ‘battle’ into a line or cutting an existing phrase and adding the accoutrements of warfare: a soldier, a tent, a march. In an essay wonderfully titled “Does “Text” Exist?”, Louis Hay reports that Jean Levaillant called these manuscript insertions ‘keystones’—single words ‘that can attract the meaning of an entire page’.9

In its simplest and most direct form, Whitman’s insertion of armed conflict (or the potential for conflict) by adding the keystones ‘war’ and ‘wars’ can be seen in the heavily-revised “Apostroph”. In lines ecstatically celebrating the attributes of the United States—‘O days by-gone! Enthusiasts! Antecedents! | O vast preparations for These States! O years!’—Whitman bluntly inserts the word ‘wars!’ amid the mass of cancellation at the end of the first line (Blue Book I:107). Before excising the poem in its entirety, Whitman preserves the phrase ‘O you grand Presidentiads! I wait for you!’ and adds, poignantly, or in frustration, that these ‘grand Presidentiads’ are to come only ‘after these wars are over’ (Blue Book I:108). In the concluding poem of the 1860 edition “So Long!”, Whitman revises the line ‘I announce the Union more and more compact’ to become ‘I announce out of all its wars the Union more and more compact’ (Blue Book I:453)—describing a Union born out of its conflicts, but secure only after such ‘wars’. In a crisp pencil insertion to “Walt Whitman”, the scope and extent of these ‘wars’ is given in two lines added to the bottom margin that interrupt the rebel ‘gayly adjusting his throat to the rope-noose’:

The days I live, the passions immense,

The bloody vindictive battles, with thousands
falling, or throes of peace or war,

(Blue Book I:80)

Capturing the pith of the poet’s ‘days’, these lines remain lexically unrevised (a rare condition for Whitman’s annotations) but are crossed-through by two heavy cancelling strokes. No indication is given of where they are to be inserted in the manuscript.

In “Chants Democratic” 1 (later, “By Blue Ontario’s Shore”) the word ‘wars’ is again simply added to a long list describing the disposition of ‘These States’ and the bard who will sing of them:

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Some nine pages later, the persona, rather than inviting the American people ‘to speak beautiful words’ (one of Whitman’s oldest exhortations) is implored to ‘Sing the \textsuperscript{\textbf{warlike}} song of the land!’:

This added content shifts from the speaking of benignly ‘beautiful words’ to a singing of ‘the song of the land’ which then rises to a ‘warlike song’. The movement of ‘speak’ to ‘sing’ lifts these lines beyond conversation or address to become part of the \textit{songs} of \textit{Leaves of Grass}—to participate in the triumphal entertainment of poetry rather than the direct commonplace of talk. The secondary insertion of ‘warlike’ shows the war filling a missing component in the refurbished line. Apparently dissatisfied with the simple ‘song of the land’, Whitman renders it as a song of war—a shift in the tenor of the poem. In insertions such as this, it is difficult to ascertain whether the poem is prepared for the insertion of pre-written lines by the erasure of existing content (Barthes’s ‘substitutive correction’) or if the earlier text, now seen as defective, is annotated to provide an alternative.\footnote{Barthes, “Flaubert and the Sentence”, 300.} Both of these operations are potentially active in this line.

In “Proto-Leaf”, Whitman supplements an unsettling passage that projects ‘A new race, dominating previous ones, and grander far, with new contests’:
Golden reads the revisions here as moving through three stages:

1. …grander far, with new wars, new contests,
2. …grander far, with new, grander wars, new contests,
3. …grander far, with grander wars, new contests,

(Blue Book II:20)

In this set of revisions, the figure of war (in this instance ‘wars’) is added and removed in annotation, rendered in the free space allowed by the end of the original line. The people of the United States are here imbued with an expansive colonial or imperial power in their search for ‘new wars, new contests.’ The novelty of these wars, their newness, is then cancelled for their value: they become ‘grander wars’ which is soon deleted in ink. Following this insertion, the entirety of the war-related additions are removed so that the line almost returns to its original status, supplemented only with the search for ‘new contests’—a still rather combative outlook. In their brief flaring, these (presumably quick) revisions show a poet searching for avenues to insert references to war—a process revealed only in the hidden bundles of annotation.

On the underside of a paste-on appended to “A Word Out of the Sea” (later, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”)—and nestled alongside an unrelated note for a projected ‘Article on Death of Brooklyn’s most ancient citizen, Andrew Demarest’—Whitman trials a battle:

![Figure 17. Pencil revisions to a trial line in the second of two paste-ons added to “A Word Out of the Sea” (detail) (Blue Book 269). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

Golden reads this paste-on’s revisions as follows:

1. Battles, the whirl of foul intestine war, my friends, mortally wounded.
2. Battles, the whirl of fouls, horrors of foul intestine war, The news of my friends, mortally wounded.
3. Battles, the horrors of foul intestine war, The news of the deaths of my friends, mortally wounded.

(Blue Book II:27)
Recalling *Henry IV Part 1* in which the figure of Rumour, ‘painted full of tongues’, introduces the warring factions who ‘Did lately meet in the intestine shock | And furious close of civil butchery’ (I.i.12-13), the ‘battles’ begin in the ‘whirl of foul intestine war’ amid the mortal wounds of the speaker’s ‘friends’, personalising the conflict. In the second tier (or branch) of revisions, the ‘whirl’ is replaced by the ‘horrors’ of war as the news of death makes its way to the speaker. The ‘whirl’ of the war is here set aside for the more immediate horror of death. The ‘news of my friends, mortally wounded’ becomes the redundant ‘deaths of my friends, mortally wounded’—the repetition of the death strand perhaps the only way to capture the ‘horror’ of the conflict. At the beginning of the Civil War, no formal system of notification for the death or injury of family members was in place so the ‘news’ of these experiences was a source of great anxiety.\(^{11}\) Whitman himself lived in a state of constant anxiety over the fate of his brother George who joined the Thirteenth New York militia after the firing on Fort Sumter and miraculously survived the remainder of the conflict.\(^{12}\) These revisions emphasise the trajectory of that ‘news’ from its addition in the second tier of revision to its movements from the battlefield to the mourning friend. It distils the ‘whirl’ of the war into its simplest, most heartrending particulars—only to then dissolve into the ‘deaths’ of friends.\(^{13}\)

Though difficult to determine with any certainty, it appears that Whitman then cancels these lines from their place in “A Word Out of the Sea” and moves them as a revised group to “Walt Whitman”. In the process, the poet-revisor vividly enacts Matt Miller’s idea of ‘collage’, the method of capturing how text is moved, rearranged, and reinserted as a block:

\[\text{FIGURE 18. Marginal insertion to line group 19 in “Walt Whitman” (detail) (Blue Book 27). The Walt Whitman Archive.}\]

In revision, these lines again shift through many types of death:


\(^{13}\) For this often-explored theme in Civil War art and literature, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 132-149.
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the deaths of my friends mortally wounded, the fitful events,

... news, the deaths of my friends dropping of comrades mortally wounded, many fitful events,

... news, the dropping of comrades mortally wounded, many fitful events,

... news, the many fitful events,

(Blue Book II:27)

The ‘battles’ documented here produce more than the deaths of the poet’s ‘friends’ but also—with dramatic understatement similar to the Alamo section of “Walt Whitman”—the ‘dropping of comrades’. The phrase ‘the deaths of my friends’ and its revision ‘the dropping of comrades’ are then refined out, pared back until they both disappear—the poet adding and cutting until only the anodyne ‘fitful events’ remain. The insertion of the word ‘comrades’ pits not only brother against brother but brings current and potential lovers to their death. This adds a note of tenderness to Whitman’s warfare revisions: the triumphal celebrations of conflict become an elegy, the poet’s song turned to mourning for the dead. The revisions give a last snapshot of a soldier’s life before his wounds take him, the poet’s hand in theirs. ‘One touch of your hand to mine O boy’, Whitman writes in the Drum-Taps poem “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night”, ‘I faithfully loved you’.14 Both heroic and doleful, the ‘fratricidal’ nature of the conflict—the patriotic myth of the ‘brother against brother’—is preserved but becomes focused here on the potential injuries inflicted upon the men with whom the poet is in loving contact.15

In its movement from the peripheral poem “A Word Out of the Sea” to the central poem of Leaves of Grass—“Walt Whitman”—this scene of war and the tragedy it evokes becomes itself centralised. War and the presence of soldiers are reshaped as if elemental to Leaves of Grass but here consigned to a peripheral dimension because ‘they are not the Me myself’

14 Walt Whitman, in F. De Wolfe Miller (ed.) Walt Whitman’s Drum-Taps (1965) and Sequel to Drum-Taps (1865-6): A Facsimile Reproduction (Gainsville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1959). This edition prints these books with their original pagination so references to Drum-Taps will be cited parenthetically in text as DT with references to Sequel to Drum-Taps cited as SDT.

15 For the ‘erotic liberation that the elegiac tradition has made available’, see Cavitch, American Elegy, 246. For the ideological underpinning of this myth of the ‘fratricidal conflict’ see McCurry, Confederate Reckoning, 17.
Both central and marginal, the annotations clash with existing lines, interacting with the elder text in productive ways. ‘These come to me days and nights,’ the poet writes in lines following this insertion, ‘and go from me again,’—transforming the ‘battles’ and ‘the horrors of fratricidal war’ into ephemeral events, washed away by time and the persona’s superhuman composure. ‘Whitman practiced a writing of “remains”,’ Max Cavitch writes in a passage that unintentionally gives an extraordinary description of this aspect of the Blue Book. Whitman’s writing, Cavitch explains, is ‘not just about unassimilable pieces or fragments of wartime experience, including erotic experience and memorable glances, but writing that is itself characterized by patchwork, discontinuity, and open-endedness.’ The annotatory ‘remains’ deposited in the Blue Book shift through so many incarnations that they remain uneasily intertwined with their 1860 counterparts, branching in evocative and richly disordered fragments.

Two consecutive scenes that relate a story of battle—the Alamo and sea-fight sections of “Walt Whitman”—are revised in contrasting ways. The first appears as excision, the second as preservation. In the first recollection (or inception) of a battle, the persona appears as multiple individuals taking part in combat. The poet begins by cancelling the entirety of the line group beginning ‘I tell not the fall of the Alamo, | Not one escaped the fall of Alamo, | The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo’ and then block cancels the entire scene with a note that reads ‘out altogether’. Whitman here excises a major nationalistic emblem. As part of a colonial war to annex major sections of Mexico for the U.S., 412 Americans died at the hands of Mexican soldiers in Goliad, Texas, in 1836. In graphic detail the poet tells of the massacre, related in a low monotone: ‘Some, half-killed, attempted to crawl away, | These were dispatched with bayonets, or battered with the blunts of muskets’. The scale of American bloodshed is contained in a trial line that marks the top margin: ‘Out of the four hundred and thirty, only eighteen escaped alive’. On the opposite page, the deaths are made more graphic, only to be cancelled some time later: ‘Hear now the deed in cold blood at Goliad Texas, in war old times my early youth’ (Blue Book I: 76). Whitman introduces into these lines more cruelty (‘in cold blood’), a more familiar locality (‘Texas’ over ‘Goliad’) and traces the event from simple ‘war’ to a story echoing about ‘in old times’. These events then rest in the time of the poet’s more personal ‘early youth’. By these changes, Whitman experiments with

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16 Cavitch, American Elegy, 238. Note that Cavitch is writing here of Drum-Taps and Specimen Days.
17 See Reynolds, Walt Whitman’s America, 327. As Erkkila has argued, these lines help to justify American imperial violence—their revision out of the book happening at a time when just that imperium was being expanded. See Betsy Erkkila, “Whitman and the American Empire” in Geoffrey M. Sill (ed.) Walt Whitman of Mickle Street: a Centennial Collection (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 59-66.
alternate forms of storytelling and memorializing—shifting the partisan intensity (and even source) of the harrowing event.

In spite of the focus on death in many of Whitman’s poems, this characteristically patriotic story may cleave a little too close to the realities of contemporary warfare. The final line ‘and marched back prisoners of war’ is cancelled and then restored, perhaps evoking for the poet George Whitman’s detention in a Confederate prison. When compared to Whitman’s preservation and even expansion of death notices in the Blue Book—‘carnage’, ‘mortally wounded’, ‘I witnessed the corpse’, ‘And again Death—Death, Death, Death’—the inclusion of this story in a time of mass death was perhaps too much for a readership so shaped by the carnage. As Drew Gilpin Faust has noted, ‘for those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War, the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death.’

Though Whitman preserved these lines in altered form in the 1867 edition, there is an unease around the idea of death-as-execution during the war. ‘To live amid so many unassimilable deaths,’ Cavitch concludes, ‘challenged ontological, as well as memorial resourcefulness.’

In the sea-fight section beginning on the following page, Whitman turns his attention to a naval battle, heightening and expanding the speaker’s connection to maritime warfare. While most battle-scenes in the 1860 Leaves emphasise the experience of infantry, this section takes naval personnel as its focus. In revision, Whitman adds that ‘a tale of the sea – an old fashioned frigate fight’ will be told ‘as my grandfather’s father the sailor told it to me’ (Blue Book I: 77). This phrase ‘my grandfather’s father’ is added some five times to the two-and-a-half pages that comprise the section—three of them as ‘great grandfather’s father’—linking the speaker to martial triumph (Blue Book I:78-9). Of the entire scene recalling the battle, the only major insertion of text appears in this form. The remainder is left with Whitman’s now-common practice of eliding terminal vowels and shifting line-endings from commas to semicolons. In comparison with the Alamo section, he preserves almost in full a story of heroic warfare—a scene depicting valiant death in combat rather than by massacre. In both of these major reworkings, revision operates within a structure of popular memory: it allows an event, however shaped within patriotic ideology, to be memorialised (the sea-fight told by a great many great-grand-fathers) or forgotten (in the excision of the entire Alamo section). As mass death surrounds the poet, the massacre is elided, allowing it to sink into forgetting through the revisory practice of excision—eliminating it from future readings. Katherine Kinney remarks of a description of a massacre in Memoranda During the War, that ‘[t]hese are the

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18 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, xiii.
19 Cavitch, American Elegy, 239.
things that Whitman wrote that “it was best the public should not know”.’ ‘In the war prose,’ she adds, ‘it is dangerous to forget and dangerous to remember.’ The sea-fight section, celebratory in its depiction of martial violence, is preserved in full—and even threaded with familial remembrances—while the massacre of the Alamo is excised. The recasting of initial text becomes here a hinge between remembering and forgetting: the exercise of preservative revision maintains the connection while that of excision severs it. The poetic record of events—the presence or absence of a conflict—is held in suspension by being included or excluded from a future volume.

‘The Army of Those I Love’: The Patient Soldier

By an increased attention to combat, Whitman infuses into his work the military personnel he so often met with, spoke with, and watched in his perambulations around the capital. Embodying the thousands of wounded men he lovingly nursed in the hospitals, the figure of the soldier gains increasing prominence in his writings. These experiences were often condensed into visceral descriptions of the wounded—what he called in a letter to O’Connor ‘thumb-nail sketches’. ‘[T]his is the bed of death,’ he writes in one hospital notebook, he is failing fast—the muffled groan, the laboring panting chest & throat, the convulsion7 without intermission, the attitude of the hands, the restlessness—the contraction & dilation of the nostrils—fortunately he is out of his head, poor fellow.22

In “Lilacs”, the poet mourns ‘battle-corpses, myriad of them, | And the white skeletons of young men’. During the conflict he cannot restrain from observing ‘the debris and the debris of all dead soldiers’ (SDT:11). In a letter home to his mother in June 1864, Whitman writes of the bodies of the wounded: ‘We receive them here with their wounds full of worms—some all swelled and inflamed. Many of the amputations have to be done over again.’ In the hospitals, Hutchinson observes, Whitman ‘would mediate between the battlefront and the


civiliansphere, the living and the dead, the immediate bodily reality and its poetic inscription for all later generations’. On the cover of the first of his wartime notebooks, the poet movingly inscribes a title: ‘Walt Whitman, Soldiers’ Missionary’.

And yet unlike contemporary accounts, the soldiers that enter the Blue Book are not injured or suffering or heroically engaged in battle as in previous editions. They are largely static, unvoiced, often appearing only as the word ‘soldier’. The wounded of Washington’s hospitals emerge again and again in the poet’s memoranda but in the Blue Book revisions, there is less poetic focus on the mutilated or wounded body—the soldiers appearing in a time prior to receiving their wounds. Ineluctably bound to the activity of warfare, the military personnel added in annotation are, oddly enough, not often engaged in battle. Not yet broken or torn by their experience in combat, the soldiers that appear in the Blue Book have a certain incorporeality, a ghost-like faintness to them—the first annotatory experiments of their movement into Leaves. Lindsay Tuggle has observed that during the war years, Whitman’s book becomes a kind of ‘textual crypt’ that ‘houses the spectres of lost soldiers, allowing author and reader continued access to their afterlives’. In Memoranda, Whitman confirms these soldiers’ ‘unworldliness’, describing ‘[s]omething veil’d and abstracted’ that ‘is often a part of the manners of these beings’.

Uncertain and often inactive, the figure of the soldier appears added in annotation throughout the Blue Book. The celebration of ‘our armies’ reaches such a peak in “Chants Democratic” 1 that they become the future of America. No other poet is accorded the skill to encompass them in song. In a revision, Whitman attacks these supposedly lesser poets by asking: ‘How dare these petty fiddling little creatures write poems for America? | For our armies, & the generations following them? + the offspring begotten by them?‘ (Blue Book I:100). Later in the poem, Whitman even goes so far as to limit the entire polity of the United States to military personnel: remaking America as a ‘race of soldiers & free men’ only to quickly cancel the insertion and add the more inclusive ‘equal race of the free’ (Blue Book I:117). A more subdued insertion appears in the sixth line of a large paste-on added to the first page of “Proto-Leaf”. Whitman quietly presents, in a list of occupations, that of ‘a soldier camped, or

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25 Morris, The Better Angel, 5. At the outbreak of war, Ralph Waldo Emerson also inscribed a journal with a title: the decidedly less sentimental ‘WAR’.
26 Lindsay Tuggle, “The Afterlives of Specimens: Walt Whitman and the Army Medical Museum” Walt Whitman Quarterly Review 32.1 (2014): 17. Davis describes the soldiers appearing in Whitman’s work as possessing a ‘fugitive strangeness’—even going so far as to describe them as ‘ghost soldiers’ (Davis, Romance of Medicine, 74, 81).
marching bearing carrying my knapsack and gun’ (Blue Book I:5). In one of the few annotated passages to portray the violence of war, a cancelled pencil insertion describes the soldier as ‘lying wounded + bloody’—lines almost entirely free from the physicality of the hospital memoranda and wartime correspondence. This phrase offers only the bare minimum of description: the soldier remains indistinct and unrecognized apart from his wounds.

This added military presence is repeated twice late in “Walt Whitman”. In the first, Whitman adds ‘Or a soldier camped, or in battle or on the march, is mine: my child: mine’ to a section describing phenomena that would allow the persona to be understood (Blue Book II:99):

The camp, the battle, the march: Whitman is cataloguing the experience of infantry, coupled with a familiar flare of parental concern. The ‘battle’ here lacks the detail of the three previous editions; it becomes one more aspect of the soldier’s mundane activities. The quietude of a soldier at camp or the ponderousness of the march is broken only by a dividing ‘battle’ inordinately light on detail. Whitman adopts the stance (as he often does) of a parent overseeing his ‘child’ only for the word to be cancelled and the soldier (described finally as ‘mine’) becoming simply possessed by a speaker who also becomes a soldier himself. The entirety of this passage is then cancelled with one horizontal and three vertical pencil strokes.

‘Still dissatisfied with its position’, Golden remarks, Whitman reinserts this passage in reworked form on the following page, compressed into the top margin (Blue Book II:100):

Golden decants these insertions into trial lines a, b, and c:
a. The soldier camp’d, or in battle, or on the march is mine;

b. On the night ere the pending battle many seek me, + I do not fail them

c. On the solemn night, (who knows of it may but his to know last,) those that know me seek me

(Blue Book II:100)

Together, these three intertwining lines are all soldier-related: the persona becoming the valiant and loving possessor of the perishable ‘soldier camp’d’ (in line a); the coming together (in lines b and c) for erotic contact at night, the fleeting encounter energized by the knowledge that ‘it may be last’—a poignant reminder of the immanence of death. These heavily-revised, drawn-out lines are messier than their previous iteration: they are folded over each other in the margins, entangled like the entangled bodies they reference. As Whitman writes in “Calamus” 5, ‘friendship […] shall twist and intertwist through and around each other’ (LG 1860:349). Rather than focusing on the bloody effects of combat or the intimate contact of convalescence, Whitman describes here a phase prior to combat: the act of postponement, a time the soldier passes with the poet. The very sparseness of these insertions becomes part of the pleasure of the text—the soldier remains elusive, muted, both distant and close by.

In the c line, the phrase ‘it may be last’ (in reference to the ‘solemn night’) is a later revision of ‘it may be his to know’. The latter phrase’s removal marks the intimate act as private or to be reinserted elsewhere. The memory, in the form of a line of verse, is carried with the erstwhile lover but scratched out in revision, leaving only its trace on the page. As noted above, revision (among its many attributes) becomes a way of negotiating with memory—a pivoting between what is memorialized and what is forgotten. Here, a verse fragment is marked for forgetting. The line that strikes it through suspends the memory of the encounter in the tent between the singing Walt and the ethereal soldier. And yet the traces of intimate companionship, embodied in annotation, cannot be wholly excised. The manuscript becomes a repository of fleeting erotic contact, the memories of which are preserved in the strata of revisory insertions. In the hospitals, Davis argues, Whitman revelled in ‘the complexity of a homosexual romance never wholly known, named, mastered, or made public.’

In these revisions, the persona becomes sought before war, an elder figure who can

28 Davis, Romance of Medicine, 40-1.
give council or ‘affection’ and ‘cheering love’ (as Whitman later noted) to the soldiers in his care.\textsuperscript{29} Rather than the working men who populate the 1860 edition—the smiths, cab-drivers, ferryboat drivers, and others—the Blue Book infuses military personnel with an increased erotic and emblematic presence, securing them a more central role in Leaves. 

Vividly on display in “Chants Democratic” 3 (here titled in draft “I sing the body electric”) Whitman adds the keystones ‘army’ and then ‘armies’ which survive until the final edition of Leaves:

In these revisions, the opening line ‘O MY children! O mates!’ becomes for the first time ‘I sing the body electric, with love’. This final hinge ‘with love’ is (sadly) removed, creating and preserving only the familiar five-word opening, eventually raised to become the title. The poet continues in a series of complex pencil insertions added to the second line:

1. O the bodies of you, and of all men and women, their bodies engirth me. The bodies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them,
2. The bodies\textsuperscript{armies} of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them, (Blue Book I:291)

The ‘bodies’ that ‘engirth’ the poet become those enlisted in military service. As Coviello has argued, the Civil War ‘transforms’ and ‘extends’ rather than diminishes Whitman’s ‘vision of sex’.\textsuperscript{30} It is the soldier who, out of the span of ‘all men and women’, becomes the speaker’s privileged love-object.

This line is then refined in an insertion in the bottom margin, marked by a star and a guideline:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{Title revisions to “Chants Democratic” 3 (detail) (Blue Book 291). The Walt Whitman Archive.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{29} Walt Whitman to Nicholas Wyckoff or Daniel L. Northup, 14 May 1863 in Corr., 1:102.

Golden renders this rather simple insertion into two stages:

1. The army of those I love engirth me, + I engirth them,
2. The armies of those I love engirth me + I engirth them,

(Blue Book II:291)

The soldiers who remain the poet’s lovers, here as elsewhere, now emerge from the entire country or from the multiple armed forces of the world—the pluralized ‘armies’ of all sides. While Whitman was, as David Blight observes, most ‘certainly a Yankee partisan’, this shift specifies the bodies loved by the poet in non-partisan terms. The soldiers added to the Blue Book may not be clothed in blue uniforms: they could be Confederates, or even combatants of another war. Like the sectional embrace of ‘Take them South + and take them North!’ (Blue Book I: 8) and the elided ‘I at any rate include you all South and North’ (Blue Book I:18), soldiers are drawn in the Blue Book with little consideration of which side they are fighting for.

In an untitled poem in “Debris”, Whitman incorporates a language of soldiery that is hinted at and then removed. This poem is provisionally entitled “The only good army” but is then crossed-through:

The first line within the body of the poem (‘What General has a good army in himself, has a good army’) is modified so that the phrase ‘has a good army’ is changed to ‘has the only good

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army in himself’ (Blue Book I:421). This minor insertion emphasizes a conflict lodged only within the General—that is, away from the experiences of military personnel themselves. The passage’s terminal semi-colon is then cut and replaced by a period, closing off the preceding lines. The remaining aphorisms that address an undisclosed ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘you’ are then removed with multiple cancelling strokes. These excisions leave only the martial opening intact so that, if published, the entire poem (or numbered section) would consist of a single gnomic phrase: ‘What General has a good army in himself, has the only good army’. Unusual in its depiction of martial experience, the poet here emphasizes a military of the mind, abstracted from living uniformed men. In this set of revisions Whitman steps noticeably away from his celebrations of military combat. He draws the conflict inside a single figure, containing and enclosing the war. The poem in its entirety, along with the remainder of the annotated page, is then collected in a wavering line with a note to take ‘all this out’.

This threading of an impalpable, almost passive, martial experience is repeated in “Chants Democratic” 1 (later, “By Blue Ontario’s Shore”). Some eight lines after the addition of the poet’s announcement to ‘Sing the warlike song of the land!’ (Blue Book I:121), Whitman cancels the persona’s examination of the American people—‘I have studied my land, its idioms and men,’—for ‘I have sped to the camp, I have been with the soldiers of every part, I have studied their idioms’:

![Figure 24. Revisions to “Chants Democratic” 1 (detail) (Blue Book 121). The Walt Whitman Archive.]

Golden transcribes these insertions in the left margin:

1. I have studied my land, its idioms and men,
   sped to the camp, I have been with soldiers of every part, I have
   studied their idioms,

2. I have sped to the camp, I have been with the
soldiers natives of every part, state, I have
studied their idioms.

3. I have sped to the camp, I have been with the
natives of every part, I have studied their
idioms.

(Blue Book II:121)

In these revisions, the poet’s ‘my land’ becomes transformed into ‘the camp’, the entire
country becoming a site of war through the reworking. By studying their ‘idioms’, the
persona transforms the prior iteration so that the fighting men emerge from some undisclosed
elsewhere—other parts of the country, or other parts of the world. The word ‘soldiers’ is then
revised to become ‘natives’. By this change, the word ‘camp’ similarly shifts to suggest non-
military accommodation. As in the revisions to “Debris” above, the martial content of these
lines is removed or at the very least reduced. This identification and then erasure of
soldierhood is repeated on the back of a paste-on containing four separate verse fragments
added to the short poem “To My Soul”. With little indication of where they are to be inserted,
Whitman drafts the lines: ‘From my tent of war emerging, no more for good | Loosening the tent
ropes’ (Blue Book I:449). Hinting at a glimpse of the speaker’s involvement in a sexual
encounter with a soldier—and perhaps as a soldier—Whitman abandons his annotations and
the line breaks off.32 The specifying phrase ‘of war’ is inserted to describe the tent the
speaker emerges from—clarifying the military dimension of the insertion and then expunging
it by erasure. In the Blue Book, Whitman often reworks a passage under a military plan only
to remove it later or return it to its previous iteration. The ‘soldier’ may briefly arise in the
manuscript, only to be swept aside in another wave of annotation.

Hardly a formidable fighting presence, the soldiers of the Blue Book are quiet, ephemeral
figures shifting near death through the manuscript. A delicate presence of muted inactivity,
they are almost solemn, without faces or figures to thrill the poet. Unidentified and
undescribed, they pass into the Blue Book with no voices or dialogue to accompany them. In
Memoranda, Whitman describes the ‘bravest soldiers’ of both sides as those who are
‘[u]nnamed, unknown.’33 The poet may add the word ‘battle’ or ‘war’ but often spares the

32 Golden notes that these lines finally made their way into the Sequel to Drum-Taps poem “To the Leaven’d
Soil They Trod” as ‘But forth from my tent emerging for good—loosing, untying the tent-ropes’ (Blue Book
II:449).
details of such additions. Very few bodies breathe and bleed in the battle-scenes of the Blue Book. Contrary to the raucous energy of the 1867 edition’s self-consciously bellicose ‘O the cannons ope their rosy-flashing muzzles! The hurtled balls scream! | The battle-front forms amid the smoke—the volleys pour incessant from the line’, they are more subdued, far from the vividness of detail and idealized grandeur of the earlier editions (LG 1867:12c). Writing of the ‘relative absence of violence’ from Drum-Taps, Cody Marrs writes that if ‘Whitman is more interested in fragments than in totality, it makes sense that violence manifests only as something that is expected, remembered, or mourned over.’ Rather than opening vividly before us, the ‘horrors’ of the conflict do not often make their way to the soldiers drawn in annotation. In 1888, Whitman told Traubel that the merit of the ‘War pieces’ is ‘not chiefly literary—if they have merit—it is chiefly human—it is a presence-statement reduced to its last simplicity—sometimes a mere recital of names, dates, incidents—no dress put on anywhere to complicate or beautify it.’ The poet may be comfortable with individual death, with abstract violence and the ‘chiefly human’ presence of the soldier, but killing itself is not so celebrated.

‘And a Song of the Mistress Over All’
The discourse of warfare so meticulously threaded through the Blue Book is of course not inserted independently or discretely: it becomes intertwined with extant passages and figures within Leaves. Among these inosculations, a language of combat and conflict is interwoven with a figure described by critics as the ‘Union’ or ‘Democratic’ Mother. In an 1860 notebook, Whitman writes of his idea to ‘bring in the idea of Mother—the idea of the mother with numerous children—all, great and small, old and young, equal in her eyes—as the identity of America.’ ‘Even before the war,’ Erkkila writes, “The Mother of These States” was in Whitman’s view the appropriate emblem of the American republic.’ During the Civil War, the sentimental depiction of flag-waving, farewelling, and devoted women on the home front (very often portrayed as mothers) was a commonplace in the popular literature of both

34 Marrs, Nineteenth-Century American, 28. Sweet accounts for this vagueness by arguing that ‘[a]ctual bodies of soldiers are marginalized because the representation of a single powerful figure (with a single will) is appropriate to the assertion of the priority of order out of chaos, whereas an individual man can seldom be represented with this sort of power’ (Sweet, Traces of War, 20).
35 Traubel, With Walt Whitman, 2:78.
36 Walt Whitman, quoted in Erkkila, Political Poet, 262.
37 Ibid. See also Coviello, Tomorrow’s Parties, 61.
In the writings of some commentators, the state itself was depicted as being embodied in all patriotic women—figures of hope that soldiers could fight and die protecting. Writing for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1863, Northern minister and frequent periodical contributor Samuel Osgood sentimentally evokes ‘the good mother’ who is ‘seated at the window from which floats the household flag’ and is ‘watching intently the passing regiment, and waving her handkerchief to some friend or kinsman.’ ‘The sight of her and her daughters,’ Osgood continues,

brings the whole country nearer to us, and the great continent seems to rise before us in living personality, and to speak with her voice, and to glow with our affections. The nation seems to live in the person of its queen, and here every patriotic woman does a great deal to impersonate the whole government.39

This popular figuring of the national state was not of course confined to the North or to Unionist discourse. As Civil War historian Stephanie McCurry explains, ‘[i]mages of the state as a woman proliferated in southern political discourse and iconography’—a component of the precipitating secession crisis. ‘In the late antebellum southern states,’ McCurry continues, ‘the female figure of the state took many forms […] but none more commonly than mother’.40

In some ways reengineering these commonplace formulations, Whitman largely preserves the language of the 1860 text celebrating the lives of presumably white American women. But the significance and rate of reappearance of the figure of the Mother is particularly enhanced. As in all editions of *Leaves*, Whitman’s Blue Book evocation of a patriotic ideology of motherhood is designed to instil not only national unity but, as Michael Moon has argued, ‘a support for male-homoerotic desire and behavior’.41 The Mothers who

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populate the Blue Book recalibrate the national Union toward what Erkkila has called ‘an alternative matriarchal economy’ that represents ‘a benignant model of female power that Whitman used to counteract the centralized administration of the state and the aggressively capitalist and male-powered ethos of the new market economy.’

The figure of the Mother (or the ‘Mistress’) is added on six separate occasions in the Blue Book and removed twice. While these additions and deletions are not easily reconstituted into a clear revisory pattern, I will focus here on three revision sites in which the figural mother becomes intertwined with the fighting of wars, the overseeing of soldiers, and the strengthening of the Union. Like so many shifts in Whitman’s writing during the Civil War, the Blue Book reveals the minute textual work required to embellish the unifying, adhesive figural mother with a warlike demeanour.

In a New York Times article of 1865, Whitman writes of his joy at watching Lincoln’s second inauguration. Describing ‘the oceanic crowd’ that passed ‘down at one end close by the capitol,’ he emphasises its ‘milky bulging dome, and the Maternal Figure over all, (with the sword by her side and the sun glittering on her helmeted head).’ In the Blue Book, early versions of this encompassing maternal image can be found added in annotation. In “Chants Democratic” 1, for example, Whitman adds a parenthetical:

(Mother! With subtle sense + the naked sword in your hand I saw you refuse finally to treat with any but with single individuals only. )

(Blue Book I:122)

Emblematic but distinct from the democratic wrangling of the Capitol, both figures possess a sword—a symbol of an ongoing battle for liberty. In the Blue Book, the Mother’s refusal to

42 Erkkila, Political Poet, 262. It should be noted that Erkkila is not writing here of the Blue Book but of Whitman’s writings in general.

43 See Blue Book I:115, 121, 122, 124, 125, 140, 142, 229. For a more detailed discussion, see Moon, Disseminating, 211; and Vivian Pollak’s article “Motherhood” in WWE, 435-7.

treat but with single individuals only’ personalizes the mass democracy of nineteenth-century America. Evoking a national government that will oversee the needs of each individual privately, this marginal insertion is followed by an additional two pencil line groups that intermingle the Mother with democracy and Union (Blue Book I:124-125). In the second of these additions, the figure (eventually excised) becomes so all-encompassing as to be ‘covering the world’ (Blue Book I:124). Whitman’s maternal Union, in this formulation, expands to the entire earth.

In a complex insertion to “Proto-Leaf”—Golden calls the revisions to this page ‘among the most complicated in the Blue Book’ (Blue Book II:10)—Whitman adds in the top recto margin a description of his new song:

![Figure 25. Marginal insertion in “Proto-Leaf” (detail) (Blue Book II). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

Golden renders the highly uncertain top line into two stages:

1. And a song of the Mistress over all, the
   glittering delicate Mistress over all,
2. And a song of the Mistress One of many make I
   the glittering delicate Mistress over all,

   (Blue Book II:10)

The remaining lines are difficult to disentangle so are marked by Golden as trial lines c and d:

c. The fang’d & glittering Mistress One that is
   over all,
d. 1. Resolute Mistress, weapon’d Mistress over all,
   2. Resolute Mistress, weapon’d Mistress warlike
      One that is over all,
   3. Resolute warlike One that is over all,

   (Blue Book II:11)
While not overtly a ‘Mother’ figure, Whitman uses here the appellation ‘Mistress’—an addition whose capital ‘M’ remains uncertain. Separate in the Blue Book these figures remain closely intertwined, becoming after revision a blended figure—the ‘mighty mother mistress’—in *Drum-Taps* (SDT:27). In what could be their earliest form (or a revision of a proposed *Drum-Taps* version), these three smeared lines break the neat divisions of print. Heavy revisions blur into unstable knots of script, blending line and annotation into a thicket of scribbles unable to be wholly disaggregated in transcription. Squeezed into the margin and corralled by thin guidelines on the left and beneath, these additions are carefully separated out from other annotations while remaining highly indeterminate. Interlocking and restlessly unsettled, they conceal previous annotations—presenting a visceral example of Davis’s notion of ‘intermingled states’. Like the ‘Maternal Figure’ in the *Times* description and the annotatory Mother in ‘Chants Democratic’ 1, the ‘Mistress’ in these revisions is ‘weapon’d’ but equipped with undisclosed armaments.

In the later description of the Capitol building’s Liberty figure, the statue glows with the ‘sun glittering on her helmeted head’; here, the Mistress appears in two revisions as ‘fang’d and glittering’ (in line c) and ‘glittering delicate’ (in the top line). Both glowing in the sun’s light, these embattled analogues of a maternal Union fight (or have fought) for survival in a position marked ‘over all’—the summit of democratic unity. As Moon observes, ‘the generalizing and hierarchizing phrase “over all” is one of the key terms in which maternity manifests itself.’ In these insertions, the double ‘Mistress, weapon’d Mistress’ in line d is excised and exchanged for the ‘warlike One’. First equipped with weapons, the tools of war, the figure shifts in revision into ‘the One’ which is identified as ‘warlike’. In the c line, a similar process is enacted: the ‘fang’d & glittering Mistress over all’ becomes the ‘fang’d & glittering One that is over all’. For a brief period during the Civil War, Whitman emphasized this ‘weapon’d’ maternal order in *Leaves*, only for it to later morph into the revised ‘warlike One’. After the war, the figure was then reinserted back into the book in its earlier form.

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45 These lines appear in altered form in *Drum-Taps* and in the 1867 edition of *Leaves*. In their *Drum-Taps* version they read: ‘Raise the mighty mother mistress, | Waving high the delicate mistress, over all the starry | mistress, (bend your heads all,) | Raise the fang’d and warlike mistress, stern, impassive, weapon’d mistress. | Pioneers! O Pioneers!’ (DT:26).

46 This image recurs in the “Centenarian’s Song” in *Drum-Taps* but used as a description of a general: ‘By his staff surrounded, the general stood in the middle—he held up his unsheathed sword, | It glitter’d in the sun in full sight of the army’ (DT:21).

47 Moon, *Disseminating*, 213. In *Drum-Taps*, the ‘Mother of All’ appears once again in “Pensive on Her Dead Gazing, I Heard the Mother of All”, imploring the living earth to absorb the blood and bodies of the slain soldiers (DT:71).
Enmeshed within a literary culture of ‘sentimentalized patriotism’ (as Fahs calls it), Whitman’s Mother figures are not unusual in Civil War literature by their presence but by their role. Rather than the lachrymose, idealistic, and one-dimensional popular wartime mother figures, Whitman’s Blue Book revisions inscribe a ‘Mistress’ who becomes fused with the attacking, defending and armoured posture of war. In what Bryant has called a ‘revision code’, this figure is then revised out, a transformation that may be represented schematically as Mistress → One. Every instance of the word Mistress in this revised sequence is altered to One—drawing a clear link between them, a mappable transformation. In examining the 1867 version of these lines (which preserves the change), Moon argues that with the ‘Civil War over, the “mighty mother mistress” returns to her previously ungendered, altogether undifferentiated form as the “One,” the Union.’ The Blue Book reveals the mechanics of this transformation from the ‘weapon’d Mistress muted (but not erased) in revision to a featureless ‘One’—but in all likelihood with the war still ongoing.

This addition of a transcendental ‘over all’ motif is repeated in “Calamus” 5. Though difficult to determine a final sequence, the projected titles for this poem move from “To the States” to “Sons of the mother of all” to ‘Over the battle, sons of the mother of all’ on the following page (Blue Book I:350). In this set of reworkings, Whitman adds to the top margin unfinished lines, oddly cancelling those of the ‘Liberty’ and ‘Equality’ of lovers:

![Figure 26. Whitman’s marginal trial lines added to “Calamus” 5 (detail) (Blue Book 351). The Walt Whitman Archive.](bluebookimage)

In Golden’s rendering, these lines read:

[illegible] Over the carnage sons of the mother all
(Over the carnage, Sons of the mother of all
Rose to my ear this pensive voice, out of the west for your sake)
Affection shall yet, (it said)

(Blue Book I:351)

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48 Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War*, 123.
50 Moon, *Disseminating*, 195.
This top line ‘Over the carnage, sons of the mother all’ is potentially a new trial title almost disguised as trial first line. The ‘debris and debris’ of the war is rendered as ‘carnage’—a circumscription of a conflict whose primary features include violent death. Whitman again fuses a discourse of warfare with a maternal figure who circumscribes, preserves, and fights for her ‘sons’—the military personnel who emerge ‘out of the west for your sake’. In the final line, the unfinished phrase ‘Affection shall yet, (it said)’ hints at the momentous speaking voice of the ‘mother of all’: the first word of which is the adhesive term ‘Affection’. The riddle to this fragment’s absent ending is answered in “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice” from Drum-Taps:

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten'd—Affection shall solve the problems
of Freedom yet;
Those who love each other shall become invincible—
they shall yet make Columbia victorious.

(DT:49)

Not yet linking ‘Affection’ and the ‘carnage’ of war to ‘Freedom’, this incomplete addition in the Blue Book is crossed-through, the bonds between the soldier and the figural Mother remaining unfinished. Revealing not only the addition of warfare-related entries to Leaves of Grass but an analogous unionizing, these revisions are a seal to hold the national Union in place, here under a maternal power. As Sherry Cerniza has traced, Whitman transforms the individual woman depicted in Leaves into the ‘Mother of All’ in order to strengthen images that represented union.51 The extensive revisions to the 1860 edition’s representation of Union will be the focus of the following chapter.

51 Cerniza, 19th-Century Women Reformers, 227.
CHAPTER THREE

‗Not to Destroy Institutions’: Slavery, Nationalism, and the Preservation of the Union

The Secession war? Nay, let me call it the Union war.
—Whitman, Memoranda During the War (1875)

In the unpublished pamphlet The Eighteenth Presidency! (1856), Whitman describes an America not so well served by its elected officials; in the postwar Democratic Vistas (1871) he likewise diagnoses (and attempts to repair) the Reconstruction era’s supposed administrative failings. And yet amid this dubious vision of the state, Whitman’s support for a robust national Union remains remarkably constant. As early as the editorials of the 1840s, ‘the theme of political union’ became ‘the overarching figure of his life and work.’

Described by Peter Coviello as a kind of ‘anti-state nationalism’, the poet repeatedly prefers intimate nationhood over institutions or borders or routinized national behaviours. ‘Whitman’s love for America,’ Coviello writes, ‘which is clearly passionate and in earnest—only barely exceeds his vitriolic contempt for the state, its institutions, and its agents.’ Rather than the strictly municipal dimensions of the republic, the poet elevates an expansive mutuality between all members of a visionary collective, locating it primarily within the limits of an indeterminate national body—what he later called ‘the sacred principle of the Union’.

Throughout his verse, Whitman’s exaltation of what he terms ‘Union’ is not only a distinct array of state apparatuses—of legislative, electoral, procedural, economic, and juridical processes—but a token of sexual love and connectedness: a geographically bounded (but potentially unlimited) space in which individuals are free from subservience to any other. Appearing in the furthest reaches of the state, these individuals are often linked by ‘nativity’ (where a person was born, and by whom) and an impassioned, amatory bond.

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1 Erkkila, Political Poet, 23.
2 Peter Coviello, Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 128.
3 Walt Whitman, “NATIONALITY—(AND YET)” in Kaplan (ed.), Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 1051. In this note, the poet adds that there is an ‘equally sacred principle, the right of each State’.
known as ‘comradeship’ or ‘manly love’.\(^4\) Interfused with a connective tissue that binds its members together, this at least nominally open republic is spiritualized, intangible; its tendrils spring from person to person, threading not only belligerent regions into a web of anonymous others but uniting them into futurity. Simultaneously visceral and immediate, this fabric of a nation envelopes a collectivity whose pleasure ‘rejects none’ and ‘permits all’ (LG 1855:xii). Whitman, Ed Folsom has observed, ‘has a radical sexual politics that meets a conservatism for the preservation of America.’\(^5\) Both exalting and admonishing the foundational dimensions of American democracy, Whitman consistently attempts to secure the republic by circumscribing it within an indissoluble Union. ‘Union,’ writes Daniel Aaron, ‘was the keel that kept his religion, philosophy, and aesthetic from foundering.’\(^6\)

In an America broken by a war Whitman called ‘that great convulsive struggle for Unity’, dimensions of his poem of ‘the United States themselves’ become subject to the same breaking and uncertainty.\(^7\) The ‘Civil War threatened to deconstruct this poem,’ Timothy Sweet has argued, ‘along with the political Union’—an event so colossal that it fragments ‘the ideological ground of [his] poetics.’\(^8\) In the Blue Book, Whitman attempts to repair this fragmentation not only by emphasizing the stability of the federation but by excising and revising references to disputed state institutions (and states themselves) within Leaves of Grass. This process is perhaps signalled in the conspicuous cancellation of the following lines from “Calamus” 24—a poem briefly retitled “Not to destroy institutions”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I hear it is charged against me that I seek to destroy institutions;} \\
\text{But really I am neither for nor against institutions,} \\
\text{(What indeed have I in common with them?—Or} \\
\text{what with the destruction of them?)}
\end{align*}
\]

(Blue Book I:367)

Conceivably reversing his position on being ‘neither for nor against institutions’, the Blue Book contains broad revisions to a concept of Union. Allusions to extended lists of states, to

\(^4\) For a superb and eloquent treatment of these distinctively Whitmanian ideas, see Coviello, Intimacy in America, 143-155.
\(^6\) Aaron, Unwritten War, 59. Roy Morris, Jr. even goes so far to say that Whitman’s ‘own psychic identification with the Union was so complete and unwavering that to have questioned its preservation would have meant questioning his very existence’ (Morris, The Better Angel, 3-4).
\(^7\) Whitman in Coviello (ed.) Memoranda, 133.
\(^8\) Sweet, Traces of War, 11.
slaves and the institution of slavery, to the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the President (among others) are removed, rearranged, and reworked in a flurry of revisory activity. This intense reworking of the text by dramatic and repeated cutting scores the manuscript with traceable patterns. By restructuring sections that appear in some way provocative to Confederates (and even the so-called ‘copperheads’ of the North), Whitman removes or attenuates points of dispute between sections. This tactic of pacification has been called ‘a discourse of conciliation’ by M. Wynn Thomas, a pattern of rapprochement with the Southern slave power in the lead up to the Civil War.\(^9\) In the Blue Book, this ‘conciliation’ is enacted in the form of excisions—a revising out of the disputed attributes of American history and statehood. But the Blue Book also resists this revisory pattern: it contains an unprecedented language of attack and disgust directed at the rebellious South. As Robert Leigh Davis has argued, ‘[w]hat is less well understood is the way in which Whitman’s writings rebel against this dominant impulse [for Union] and display the signs of incompleteness, incongruence, and paradox—the signs of an “inner civil war”.’\(^10\) As seen in the retooling of the figure of the Democratic Mother and the anonymous soldiers fighting and dying for democracy, Whitman’s concept of ‘Union’—its constituent institutions, its people, its poets, and its enemies—all come under serious revision in the Blue Book.

In what is perhaps the most significant and troubling of the Blue Book revisions, Whitman revises this Union by reworking references to slaves and the institution of slavery made throughout the 1860 *Leaves*. Lodged in a period of furious public and congressional debate over the expansion, legality and morality of slavery, about two-fifths of the time spent revising the Blue Book was undertaken after the signing of the general Emancipation Proclamation. Appearing about eight and a half months later than the Compensated Emancipation Act, the Proclamation was signed on 1 January 1863—only a month or so from Whitman’s move to Washington to begin work in the hospitals. But as Folsom notes, the ‘Proclamation had come and gone without Whitman even commenting on it, at least not in any documents that remain, and his Civil War poems never even suggested that slavery was an issue in the war.’\(^11\) As many critics have noted, Whitman viewed chattel slavery primarily as a threat to white labour. ‘Whitman opposed not slavery,’ Martin Klammer writes, ‘but the


\(^10\) Davis, *Romance of Medicine*, 74.

\(^11\) Folsom, “Whitman, Race, and Poetics”, 56. Robert Leigh Davis notes that Whitman saw the ‘war was caused […] not by slavery, but by a “despotism” of special interests manipulating political events in the 1850s and victimizing the “great masses of the people”’ (Davis, *Romance of Medicine*, 73).
extension of slavery.’

No slaves, it has often been observed, are mentioned in Drum-Taps; in the Blue Book, no new African American characters (free or enslaved) are added in annotation. While Vivian Pollak notes this absence by arguing that as ‘a war poet, Whitman was reluctant to turn his attention to racial matters’, in the Blue Book he often turns to the presence of African American characters in Leaves as a revisor, engaging in a book-scale process of revision.

‘Even at its most radical,’ Klammer argues, ‘Whitman’s poetry about slavery sought to produce a poetics of Union that would bring together Northern and Southern whites.’ This chapter will begin with an examination of this ‘poetics of Union’ within the framework of Whitman’s revisions. I will trace how Whitman revises the disputed status of slaves, shifting Leaves of Grass from an albeit limited antislavery position to one in which an African American presence is preserved, reworked, and also erased. The second section will explore revision of the outward tokens of American democracy that Whitman’s poetry both celebrates and deplores. This includes deleting or reworking references to the Constitution, the President, the expansive allure of the states, and of the Union’s key formulations: principally in the phrase ‘E pluribus unam’ or (as it often appears in-text) ‘Many In One’. From the simply elided to the heightened and adjusted, Whitman’s vast revisions to a concept of Union at times branch out to bind the republic back together—and then just as deliberately shatter that unity.

The ‘Murderous, Treacherous Conspiracy’

In the Blue Book, Whitman’s revisions to the representation of slaves and the institution of slavery may be grouped into three broad categories: those that are preserved, those that are excised (or erased), and those that are substantially reworked. In Barthes’s terms of manuscript ‘correction’, all revisions may fall under ‘substantive’, ‘diminutive,’ or ‘augmentative’ reworkings—with the revisor operating ‘by permutation, subtraction, or expansion.’ As shown above, this framework of revision analysis overlooks an important

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13 Pollak, The Erotic Whitman, 175.


15 Barthes, “Flaubert and the Sentence”, 299.
revisory category: the preservation of the original (or initiating) text. Divided into these three revisory groupings (preservation, excision, and augmentation), this section will trace the large-scale reworking of the presence of slaves and free black characters depicted in the 1860 *Leaves*—a process central, as Martin Klammer has outlined, to the poet’s revising. ‘In each succeeding volume,’ Klammer writes,

> Whitman whitens *Leaves of Grass* by dissipating the presence of blacks. While nine of 12 poems in 1855 include at least one reference to black persons, few do in succeeding editions: seven of 20 in 1856, and nine of 135 in 1860. Black persons in the new 1860 poems are docile, happy, even at home in slavery.\(^{16}\)

According to Klammer, Whitman achieves this whitening by ‘deleting previous passages about black persons, just as he hoped that black persons (and American Indians) would eventually “filter through in time or gradually eliminate & disappear”.\(^{17}\) In an article on the poet’s wartime manuscript revisions, Ed Folsom forlornly notes that ‘[e]rasing race from his work during the final twenty-five years of his life was one of Whitman’s occupations, as he became increasingly silent about one of the defining issues of American history.’\(^{18}\) Folsom argues that even with this in mind the manuscripts from the Civil War period reveal ‘a brief flowering of a multiracial union’. ‘[I]n those years at the end of the Civil War’, he writes,

> Whitman was imagining, gathering evidence for, and occasional inscribing a stunning new vision of a racially healed nation, a nation that we can now glean only through his erasures and discarded writings.\(^{19}\)

If the Blue Book is included in these ‘erasures and discarded writings’, its pages yield a markedly more uncertain picture. While the war saw the breakdown and eventual collapse of the slave system, little in the Blue Book appears to mark that change. For a book that was designed to ‘grow with a growing nation’ (as Erkkila terms it), this is an extraordinary omission.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{16}\) Klammer, “Slavery and Race”, 107.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 102.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{20}\) Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 78.
In two central scenes depicting fugitive slaves, the 1860 text is conspicuously preserved: the ‘runaway slave’ and the ‘hounded slave’ sections of “Walt Whitman” (Blue Book I:34, 74). As Mancuso has noted, the persona’s rendering of aid to the fugitive slave is in breach of the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850—a principal piece of legislation strengthening the Southern slave power.21 By opposing this law, as many critics have noted, Whitman shows his opposition to the extension of slavery rather than to slavery itself. In both of these major depictions of an escaped slave, Whitman almost entirely preserves the 1860 text:

![Image showing revisions in line group 54 of “Walt Whitman”](image)

In this section, the unnamed slave remains in the text with all his incidental detail: the ‘crackling of the twigs’ when he approaches; the persona sighting him ‘through the swung half-door’; his body ‘limpsy and weak’ from the pursuit of slave catchers intent on forcing him back into bondage (Blue Book I:34). The placing of the plasters on ‘his neck and ankles’ retains its hushed eroticism in full. The only revisions made here are habitual: two commas are removed and replaced by semi-colons; the terminal ‘-ed’ in ‘stopped’, ‘bruised’, ‘entered’, ‘passed’, and ‘leaned’ are replaced with a ‘t’ or an apostrophe; and the final line is enclosed in parentheses. This passage, as Coviello writes, ‘confronts us with a moment in

which the poet’s sympathy fails quite conspicuously to cross the divide of race (which is also the divide between free and unfree). In the Blue Book, its preservation during the most important period for the changing social status of slaves affords at least a gesture toward the plight of the unfree. If, as M. Wynn Thomas has noted, the act of referencing Kansas during the 1850s was ‘political dynamite’ then referencing the language of slavery and the defiance of slaves during the Civil War was conceivably more explosive. In spite of the ease with which Whitman removes passages elsewhere in the Blue Book, this section receives comparatively little attention. Possibly representing only a simple expression of Unionist ideology, the preservation of the fugitive slave retains a fragment of the horror of slavery, left in Leaves largely without amendment.

In the second often-quoted scene, the persona famously (or infamously) becomes the fleeing slave:

![Figure 28. The ‘hounded slave’ in “Walt Whitman” is also sparsely edited (detail) (Blue Book 74). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

Only two adjustments are made in these lines: the customary alteration of commas to semicolons and the thinning of terminal vowels to apostrophes. By shifting the line endings, these verses take on a decidedly less flowing momentum. They exhibit a more lecture-like directness, a poetry of individual statements rather than the familiar cascading onwardness. While critics have emphasized Whitman’s radical empathy, Paul Outka argues that the pain of being pursued by slave catchers requires only the bare minimum of human sympathy. Nevertheless, the identification of the persona and the slave remains in the Blue Book throughout the course of the war with conspicuously light revisions—its confronting detail left intact. By preserving these sections, Whitman does not erase an African American presence from these central scenes of Leaves: they retain an accusatory or provocative power.

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22 Coviello, *Intimacy in America*, 140.
On the other hand, while not removed, these sections, unlike so many others in the Blue Book, are also not expanded: they are not supplemented in any substantive way. In a national crisis over the existence and spread of slavery, the poet does not extend or heighten these two major depictions of its human repercussions but preserves them largely in their antebellum forms.

Apart from these well-known fugitive slave scenes, Whitman also leaves untouched references to enslaved people or the institution of slavery scattered throughout the Blue Book. The character of ‘Lucifer’, for example—the rebel slave named after a rebellious angel—is left in full in “Sleep-Chasings” (Blue Book I:434). While ultimately erased in the 1881 edition, the preservation of Lucifer during the Civil War is itself noteworthy—the defiance of a rebel slave equipped with a voice and character serves as a counterpoint to the repressive rebellion of the Confederacy. Similarly, the very early “A Boston Ballad”, a poem that mocks the public response to the Anthony Burns case, is largely unrevised (Blue Book I:337). While the central figure of Burns remains unmentioned, the poem is kept in its antebellum form—again attacking the Fugitive Slave Law and preserving the radical defiance of slaves. In “Longings for Home” (later, “O Magnet South”), a poem of praise for the Southern states, Whitman preserves reference to the South as a slave system: the ‘fugitive slave’ retains his ‘concealed hut’, an abode that hints at a defiance of that order (Blue Book I:389). After removing a section on the ‘ample geography’ of America and the ‘Federal Constitution’ in “Chants Democratic” 1, Whitman preserves, amid a raft of cancellations, the ‘crimes, lies, thefts, defections, slavery’ which ‘are you and me’ (Blue Book I:123). Upholding an earlier condemnation of America’s slave system, Whitman emphasizes the complicity of the country’s white residents (and its foundational documents) in that crime.

These acts of textual preservation also extend to portions of the 1860 Leaves that contain references permeated with a nineteenth-century racism that remains intact. ‘No matter how self-liberating his poetry projects himself to be,’ Klammer surmises, ‘Whitman could never liberate himself from the hard grip of antebellum American racism.’ The poet retains a proslavery section of “Sleep-Chasings” (later, “The Sleepers”) depicting a happy equality between master and slave. ‘The call of the slave is one with the master’s call,’ Whitman writes, ‘and the master salutes the slave’ (Blue Book I:438). In the ‘turpentine distillery’ described in “Chants Democratic” 4, (later, “Our Old Feuillage”), the speaker observes ‘negroes at work,’ who remain ‘in good health’. Added in the 1860 edition, this poem

25 Klammer, “Slavery and Race”, 102
describes ostensibly happy slaves in ‘Tennessee and Kentucky’ who stay ‘busy in the coalings, at the forge, by the furnace-blaze, or at the corn-shucking’. ‘In Virginia,’ the poem continues, ‘the planter’s son’ returns ‘after a long absence’ and is ‘joyfully welcomed and kissed by the aged mulatto nurse’ (Blue Book I:162). These idyllic scenes reinforce the image of the happy or contented slave—the ruinous ideology of Southern slaveholders which presented enslaved people as suited to a life of servitude.26

In the Blue Book, Whitman also outright deletes references to the institution of slavery, the presence of slaves, and the associated concept of ‘freedom’ or ‘Liberty’ appearing in its pages. ‘A spectral presence both haunts and energizes Walt Whitman’s work,’ Folsom writes, ‘Black presences that once were there or should be there finally aren’t.’27 While excision does not necessarily indicate rejection of the excised content—each removed fragment is not in itself singularly interpretable and may be reinserted elsewhere—there is a significant number of deletions in the Blue Book without many countervailing additions. In the heavily-annotated “Chants Democratic” 1, Whitman removes the American people’s ‘deathless attachment to freedom’, an attenuation of a broader democratic ideal applying pressure on the slave system (Blue Book I:114). Later in the poem, along with a whole host of cuts—including one asking the reader ‘Are you indeed for Liberty?’—Whitman also removes the unambiguous lines:

Do you acknowledge Liberty with audible and absolute acknowledgement, and set slavery at nought for life and death?

(Blue Book I:117)

No longer exalted to ‘audible and absolute acknowledgement’, ‘Liberty’ and the setting of ‘slavery at nought’ are removed from the book.

In one of the most significant erasures, two line groups in “Says” are removed. The section (or poem) numbered “3” is crossed-through vertically twice in grey pencil and once in blue. Number “4” is also cut: twice in vertical pencil strokes (one short, one long) and once horizontally with the final line crossed out in full:

26 See Blight, Race and Reunion, 493.
3. I say man shall not hold property in man; I say the least developed person on earth is just as important and sacred to himself or herself, as the most developed person is to himself or herself.

4. I say where liberty draws not the blood out of slavery, there slavery draws the blood out of liberty, I say the word of the good old cause in These States, and resound it hence over the world.

(Blue Book I:418)

While these cuts may simply excise the kind of racialism preserved above—the eugenic disparity between the ‘least developed’ and ‘most developed’ is clear—one of the most direct attacks against slavery in the 1860 text is decidedly removed and not replaced. Like the removal of the setting of ‘slavery at nought’ in “Chants Democratic” 1, the final declarative ‘I say the word of the good old cause in These States and resound it hence over the world’ is silenced in revision. Presumably here also indicating the abolition of slavery, the ‘good old cause’ no longer appears to have a place within the Union.

Mysteriously, the following two pages of the manuscript are torn out. While these were probably removed either by accident or at some stage later in the manuscript’s life, they do present a different order of revision: one which is not initiated by annotation but by the tearing of pages from the book. One of the missing sections reads:

With one man or woman—(no matter which one—I even pick out the lowest,) With him or her I now illustrate the whole law; I say that every right, in politics or what-not, shall be eligible to that one man or woman, on the same terms as any.

(LG 1860:420)

Comprising only a segment of the removed text, the eligibility of any American—even ‘the lowest’—to secure ‘the same terms as any’ is missing from the book. Unable to secure the
‘authorial’ component of ‘authorial revision’, excision is here an uncertain prospect because it may have transpired by accident and so may not be classed as excision at all but instead a kind of accidental revision. The indeterminacy of this removal renders the erasures outlined above (and indeed throughout the Blue Book) only more visible. By being inscribed onto the pages of the manuscript, strikethroughs designate verses marked for excision from a future volume. Segments of the text are, of course, not often wholly erased in the manuscript but remain discernable through the thicket of annotation that blankets them. But it is this marking itself that makes for a troubling expansion of the purposes to which revision can be deployed in the Blue Book.

The third and most complex group of reworkings regarding the depiction of institutional slavery in Leaves are those that excise and then expand existing material. In this revisory pattern, Whitman is involved in a textual process more involved than simply striking a passage or line group. While Whitman also reworks the ‘slave auction’ section of “Chants Democratic” 3, I will focus here on the considerable revisions to “Chants Democratic” 1. In this poem, the following line is thoroughly revised and then removed:

Slavery, the tremulous spreading of hands to shelter
it—the stern opposition to it, which ceases only
when it ceases.

(LG 1860:114)

This phrase ‘the tremulous spreading of hands to shelter [slavery]’ is taken from the 1855 Preface. While the ‘first half of this statement gently embraces the Southern view,’ David S. Reynolds writes of the 1855 version, ‘the second half airs sharp antislavery anger but leaves open the possibility that it may be a very long time before slavery disappears—a gradualist view confirmed by Whitman’s statement in an 1857 Daily Times article that slavery would probably disappear in a hundred years.’28 This second ‘gradualist’ view is removed in revision. A manicule indicating an asterisk and a guideline lead to a second marginal insertion:

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 29.** Marginal insertion in “Chants Democratic” 1. Note that the available image is truncated along the right margin (detail) (Blue Book 114). The Walt Whitman Archive.

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Golden transcribes these lines, including text left out of the image above:

1. Slavery, the murderous treacherous uprising to ruins,
2. Slavery, the murderous, treacherous uprising conspiracy to raise it upon our ruins,
3. Slavery, the murderous, treacherous conspiracy to raise it upon our ruins, the ruins of ALL THE REST;

(Blue Book II:114)

Rather than softening or preserving, Whitman here heightens his attack on the slave-owning South: there is not now a ‘tremulous spreading of hands to protect’ the institution but a ‘murderous, treacherous uprising’ intent on violently defending it. In one of the few direct attacks on the Confederacy (though still left unmentioned by name), this ‘uprising’ is quickly altered to a ‘conspiracy’ set to ‘raise it upon our ruins’—the ‘ruins’ of the entire Union. This passage is again revised so that this ‘conspiracy’ becomes poised to ‘raise it upon the ruins of ALL THE REST’ (Blue Book I:114). This phrase ‘OF ALL THE REST’ marks an important swerve. Whitman focuses not merely on the citizens of the Union, but on all groups, those outside of the body politic but still within—circumscribing and absorbing (among others) the four million slaves as sufferers of such a division, extending the inclusive ‘our’ of the prior revision.

Whitman then makes drastic changes, striking portions of the 1860 text and inserting trial lines:

![Figure 30. Revisions to “Chants Democratic” 1 (detail) (Blue Book II:114). Note that this image is also incomplete along the right margin. The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

Golden transcribes the complete text of this insertion:

1. The grapple with it, (the assassin! then its life or ours be the tug—+ respite no more.
2. On and on to The grapple with it, (the you over the Scorning assassin! then its your life or ours be the tug—+ respite no more.

(Blue Book II:114)
Preserved in revised form in the abandoned volume *Songs Before Parting*, these lines describe the South as ‘the assassin’—a provocative phrase that, like the appellation of the ‘murderous, treacherous conspiracy’ above, upsets Whitman’s sectional balance in a direct attack against the slaveholding, Union-dividing Confederacy. Revised to become ‘the Scorning assassin’, the poet is poised to ‘grapple’ with the institution of slavery referenced only as ‘it’. The phrase ‘its life’—the life of the institution of slavery—is then altered to the antagonistically personal ‘your life’. The poem is then modified to address that very ‘Scorning assassin’. Speaking directly to a rebellious South whose existence is at stake for providing sustenance to slavery, the insertion of ‘On and on’ to the beginning of the line and ‘respite no more’ at its end indicates the length and arduousness of the struggle. This set of insertions is the most aggressively antislavery addition made in the Blue Book. Though largely restored to its 1860 form in the fourth edition, the previously moderate language is heightened to become an unequivocal attack on the institution itself and those who sustain it—an attack resumed in a set of holograph insertions discussed in the following section.

‘O Union Impossible to Dissever!’
As every revisory pattern discussed so far has indicated, the Blue Book bears traces of the Union’s dramatic partition into two separate, competing, orders. For a poet who later wrote of a ‘universal democratic comradeship’, an ‘old, eternal, ever-new exchange of adhesiveness’ that is ‘undisguisedly, declaredly’ given ‘the openest expression’ in his book, the Civil War was nothing less than a crisis of dividedness.\(^{29}\) The bonds of intimacy that were to draw together members of a diverse and fractious polity became ever more distant and unrealised. ‘In the face of national disunity,’ Arthur Golden writes,

> Whitman sought to impose on a number of the poems in the *Blue Book* a unity, a sense of order. Uppermost in his mind was a need for an organic oneness of all the States and of all Americans, coming together on terms of perfect equality.\(^{30}\)

While Golden argues that Whitman’s unionizing ‘need for an organic oneness of all the States and all Americans’ forms the core of the Blue Book revisions, they are not unitary in


effect but remain riddled with inconsistencies and correctives. As Moon observes, Whitman developed an ‘intensified awareness [...] of the insuperable difficulty of simply overruling division and difference.’ Together with the intensification and erasure of some of the 1860 edition’s language of slavery—the primary fissure and enmity between the states—the Blue Book is marked by further revision to a discourse of Union that presses *Leaves of Grass* in ways that are not always resolvable. Peter Coviello has observed that *Memoranda During the War* is ‘a story of the simultaneous deformation, and painstaking reassembly, of an idea of America.’ The Blue Book revisions hold a similar story, but one entangled in the artefact’s annotations. This section will focus on the intermingling of these conflicting senses of an ‘idea of America’ in the Blue Book—and how revision is the mediating, ramifying, and uncertain force between them. Rather than resolving these inconsistencies, revision increases tensions between competing formulations of Union. This poetry of Union is, of course, so vast—and its reinscription in the Blue Book so effusive—that I will focus here on a handful of revision sites that show a wavering between federal power and state power, between the republic stripped of some its familiar institutions, and then as a violent, expansive entity responding to enemies never declared to be internal. Repelling and absorbing this divisiveness is what Whitman later called a ‘centrifugal law’—a fragmented, unstable, and intimate inward pressure that would keep the Union whole.

At their most direct, Whitman’s revisions to an idea of the ‘organic oneness of all the States’ wavers between a heightening of the language of unity to the simple removal of references to the Union. In a crude metric, the word ‘Union’ in both capitalized and lower case forms appears in the 1860 *Leaves* some nine times. In the Blue Book, six of these are revised with two strengthened in revision and then removed. Similarly, the phrases ‘The States’ and ‘These States’ (including the foreshortened ‘These’) are used almost ninety times in the 1860 text in reference to America and the compact that binds them. Of these, over a half are revised. In the introductory poem “Apostroph”, Whitman’s revision to a concept of Union appears is vivid relief. Fluctuating between emphasis and excision, its text is scored with individual strikethroughs so dense that they virtually cancel the entire poem. In line by

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32 Moon, *Disseminating*, 89.  
34 Whitman, *Complete Poetry*, 1050-1.  
36 These extensive revisions include such minor changes such as collecting these phrases into parentheses, marking them to be transferred to another volume, altering ‘These States’ to ‘The States’ (see Blue Book I:118, 371), and the pages missing from “Says” (Blue Book I:418-19).
excruciating line, Whitman removes text in almost a parody of revision. Revealing excisionary processes by their inscriptive type—light pencil, heavy pencil, ink—its annotations expose successive layers of cancellation. Among these webs of annotation, the phrase ‘O a curse on him who would dissever this Union for any reason whatever’ is struck from the book—along with the key unionizing phrase ‘O compact!’ (Blue Book I:106). Incongruously, the poet then preserves the once-imploring (but now frankly untrue) exclamation ‘O union impossible to dissever!’, even emphasizing it by feebly adding ‘really’ in blue pencil:

![Figure 31. Strikethroughs with an interlinear insertion in “Apostrophe” (detail) (Blue Book 107). The Walt Whitman Archive.](image)

In these revisions, no ‘curse’ remains on ‘him who would dissever this Union’, but rather the Union is enhanced by an emphasis on its unity. Hinting at a more immanent union between individuals that is ‘impossible’ to be ‘really’ dissevered, Whitman indicates a dedication to an ideal concept of Union beyond the divisions of the era.

This oscillation between the removal of references to a disputed national order and the strengthening of that order ripples through the Blue Book revisions. In “Chants Democratic” 4, for instance, the opening line ‘America always! | Always me joined with you, whoever you are’ is supplemented with ‘Always the compact union together of you and me and all!’ which is then removed by a large vertical strikethrough (Blue Book I:159). The similarly out-of-date phrases—‘my ever united lands’ and ‘my lands are made inevitably united’—are also cut (Blue Book I:165). A passage in “Proto-Leaf” that sends ‘a shrill song of curses on him who would dissever the Union’ is removed and replaced with a trial line added in the top margin:

\[
\text{And I will make a song of the Great} \\
\text{Nation one indivisible. whatever happens.} \\
\text{(Blue Book I:10)}
\]

The curse upon ‘him who would dissever the Union’ is altered to a blunt assertion of the Union’s preservation—‘whatever happens.’—a phrase so out of place, so truncated and
awkwardly inconsonant with the remainder of the passage that it bristles with a restrained violence—a willingness to preserve the Union at all costs.

In what is almost an advertisement for states to keep the Union whole, Whitman reshapes the geographic arc of his chants. Almost without fail, if a list of states appears in the 1860 text (and there are many) there is revision. Whitman modifies almost all of them. Prior to the war, Whitman was of course in favour of state and local power rather than federal. As Erkkila has outlined:

Like Lincoln, Whitman saw the war as a struggle to preserve the Union and to secure the advance of democratic freedom throughout the world. As a Union poet, he could never fully identify himself as a poet of North against South. [...] After years of defying the ever-stronger foot of federal power, Whitman during the war years found himself on the side of national, as opposed to state, sovereignty.37

This tension can be seen in revisions to “Proto-Leaf” in which Whitman initially removes the desire to ‘make a song for These States, that no one State may under any circumstances be subjected to another State’—a line now charged with Confederate rhetoric. The poet then excises the federalizing need to ‘make a song that there shall be comity by day and by night between all The States, and between any two of them’ (Blue Book I:10). A light vertical stroke beginning from the word ‘weapons’ in the final line rises between the words ‘a’ and ‘song’, removing them in annotation. The short warning poem “Walt Whitman’s Caution”, which venerates states’ rights, enters Leaves in 1860; in the Blue Book, it is left almost unrevised with a question mark tantalizingly drawn in the left margin (Blue Book I:401). In a set of revisions to “Calamus” 5, the opening word ‘STATES!’ is struckthough, the poem then briefly retitled “To the States” and then “Sons of the mother of all” (Blue Book I:349). In this reworking, the states of the Union become the children (or the ‘sons’) of the Union Mother—bound together by filial ties rather than simply entreated into reunion.

Whitman expends so much energy reworking references to states that even the insertions themselves are copiously revised. In “Proto-Leaf”, for example, the first list of states to appear in the edition is revised:

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37 Erkkila, Political Poet, 196.
In these revisions, an entire section elaborating the span of Whitman’s ‘chants’ is thoroughly reworked: ‘Wisconsin’ is replaced by ‘Missouri’ which is then shifted into the phrase ‘down to the Mexican sea’; ‘Yankee chants’ and ‘Pennsylvanian chants’ are exchanged with chants of ‘Colorado, or Nevada’ (among others) in a jumble of reworked annotations at the foot of the page and marked by a star (Blue Book I:7). Lists of states in “Walt Whitman”, “Song of Joys” and the “Chants Democratic” cluster are similarly revised or added in annotation. The poet’s erratic cartography remaps the boundaries of his song, the span of the states drifting at times westward, then southward, then back to the north. Materially inscribing the disorder of the war’s breaking-up of the national Union, these annotations draw a connection between the various states of the prewar Union and between states on the page—inscribing a loose connective tissue to draw the two warring regions back into a harmonious whole. The Blue Book annotations have not only a spatial dimension within the manuscript but also within a readership. The poet is particularly sensitive not only to when a poem is to be read but also where.

These fluctuating revisions to a discourse of Union are perhaps most distinct in the limited but still significant deletion of references to the founding documents of American democracy: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Removing and reworking not only references to states in themselves but the documents designed to fuse those states into a Union, the poet modifies the juridical foundation of a vast democratic republic. In the
1850s, Reynolds has observed, Whitman ‘was concerned with assaults made on America’s central documents, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.’ By the time of the Civil War, it is Whitman who would remove references to these documents from his work. While Erkkila maintains that Whitman later saw the Constitution as ‘compromised’ by slavery and so, like Lincoln, looked to the Declaration of Independence for documentary support for the promise of the republic, in the Blue Book a handful of allusions to this foundational document are likewise removed.

Celebrating the Constitution in The Eighteenth Presidency! as the ‘grandest piece of moral building ever constructed’, Whitman also revels in the Declaration. A document he describes as nothing less than the ‘groundwork, feet, [and] understratum’ of a ‘free and equal’ republic, is hailed as a seminal foundation of the Union. In the Blue Book, the three references to these documents that appear in “Chants Democratic” are all struck through. In the first group of lines that describe not only rebellion (‘the haughty defiance of the Year 1’) but also a reference to ‘the formation of the Constitution’ are revised and then cancelled with clearly demarcated annotations:

In these rather orderly revisions, the phrase ‘distinct yet inevitably one’ is marked to be brought in from the margin and connected to the phrase ‘The separate States’ (Blue Book II:113). In an almost undetectable hint at disunion, the word ‘separate’ in this phrase is cancelled before the entire passage is removed. The now-dated assertion of federal power—‘The Union, always swarming with blatherers, and always calm and impregnable’—is likewise removed. Some five pages later, a similar excision is undertaken. Whitman removes revised portions taken from ‘The Federal Constitution’ section of The Eighteenth Presidency!:

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38 Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 145.
Have you considered the organic compact of the first day of the first year of the independence of The States, signed by the commissioners, ratified by The States, and read by Washington at the head of the army?

Have you possessed yourself of the Federal Constitution?

(Blue Book I:117)

Before block-cancelling the entire passage, Whitman carefully removes the mythic development of ‘the organic compact’ and ‘the Federal Constitution’. Six pages after these cancellations, the speaker lists dimensions of an America that are ‘you and me’ and excludes ‘the organic compact’ and the ‘Federal Constitution’ before again block-cancelling the entire passage (Blue Book I:123). An almost identical section at the opening of “Chants Democratic” 6 is likewise cut (Blue Book I:171).

Prior to the war, incompatible readings of the Constitution sowed increasing enmity between sections. Famously burned by the radical Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison for providing textual support for slavery, the Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens claimed that the rebellion held the opposite principle: the United States Constitution founded a republic on freedom while the Confederate States of America was founded upon unfreedom, upon slavery.\(^{41}\) By its removal, the Blue Book becomes in one way more hospitable to Whitman’s early mediating impulse to be both the poet of slaves and of slaveholders. The ‘compromised’ document is removed, bridging a divide between what Sinha calls antislavery ‘Garrisonian’ readings and proslavery ‘Calhounite’ readings.\(^{42}\) This unification of opposing sides represents a disconcerting aspect of what Karen Sánchez-Eppler has termed Whitman’s ‘poetics of merger’, an ability to control separate tiers of discourse, a ‘power to mediate oppositions’ to be able to ‘speak for both sides’.\(^{43}\) In this instance, it is the elision of speech, of text, that allows for that mediation: a document designed for revision (the Constitution) and another for rebellion (the Declaration) are revised out, their principles inhospitable to one or both sides. ‘The texts of American culture supplied dressings for

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., 470.

wounds,’ Timothy Sweet coolly surmises, ‘but too often they were only cosmetic fabrications that merely hid the wound from sight.’

This removal of references to the foundational documents of the republic also extends to the executive. Before the death of Lincoln sparked a renewed poetic interest in the presidency, many connections to the figure of the President are removed from the Blue Book. A personage whose election gave secessionists a rationale for secession, the President is referenced some thirty times in the 1860 text. In the Blue Book, just over a third of these are excised. In “Chants Democratic” 3 alone (later titled “A Song for Occupations”) reference to the President is struck through three times (Blue Book I:143-158). Of the allusions that remain, many are hostile to the office. The contentious “To a President”, for example, is circled in blue pencil with a parenthetical question mark added in the margin and struck through (Blue Book I:402). With the bifurcated Union, the Confederate States of America comprised a separate nation, afflicting each of America’s central figures with a kind of doubling—two Presidents, two Constitutions, two armies, two nations, two national bards—which is also a kind of halving, an excision of metaphorical (or metonymic) scope. After the outbreak of war, the poet is able to sing only of a reduced republic, a United States significantly diminished in scale. For the first time in the life of Leaves of Grass some of its central national signifiers—‘America’, ‘President’, ‘Constitution’, ‘Congress’, ‘Rebellion’, ‘Revolution’, ‘These States’, ‘Declaration of Independence’—acquire such sharply opposing double meanings. As disputed aspects of America many of these terms become divisive rather than unifying. While always unresolved, these excisions proliferate rather than contain references to national unity within the Blue Book. Excision becomes a way of grappling with this semantic doubling but ends only by exacerbating it. What Bryant has called ‘cultural revision’ here proliferates new meanings over time; ‘the old poems in the book’, as John Ashbery puts it, ‘have changed value’.

Amid the perhaps more conciliatory removal of references to the Union, to Northern states, the President and the Constitution—aspects of contemporary American democracy repudiated by the Confederacy, including democracy itself—Whitman adds the large paste-on inserted into the middle of “Chants Democratic” 1 (discussed above). A first glimpse of lines that made their way into the fourth edition (and into Drum-Taps), it is an insertion worth quoting in full.

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44 Sweet, Traces of War, 17.
45 These revisions may be found in Blue Book I:10, 17, 108, 115, 133, 147, 157, 172, 239, 286, 453.
Transcribed, these lines appear as the lightly revised group:

Lo! High toward heaven, this day,
Ο Libertad! From the Conqueress’ field re:
  turn’d,
I mark the new aureola around your
  head,
No more of soft astral, – but dazzling
  + fierce
With war’s flames, + the lambent lightning’s flash darts playing;
And your past immovable here you stand,
And with still the inextinguishable glance, + the
  clench’d + lifted fist ;
And your foot on the neck of the one, the
  last great latest & mightyist
Scorner, utterly crush’d before
The menacing arrogant one, that strode +
advanced with his senseless scorn,
bearing the murderous knife ;

Lo! The great wide swelling one, the scorn, braggart, that
would yesterday do so so much!

Already a carrion dead, + damned damned despised of all
the earth – an offal rank,

This day to the dunghill maggots spurn’d,

(Blue Book I:114)

Scrawled on the reverse of a crossed-out copy of “Come Up from the Fields Father”—scraps of Drum-Taps again melding with Leaves—this paste-on contains a remarkably clear accusation of guilt directed at the Confederacy. This poem, Moon argues, in all of its forms ‘registers perhaps most fully the scope of [Whitman’s] revisionary practices in the first four editions of Leaves of Grass.’ Whitman, he writes, ‘seems to have revised it more frequently and more thoroughly than any other text, and consequently it provides a primary example of the palimpsestic nature of his writing in the first twelve years of his life.’

This page-sized insertion describes a triumphal account of the war by being addressed to ‘Libertad’ who returns from what Whitman describes as the ‘Conqueress’ field’—perhaps signifying Union forces, or democracy, or the Union itself. Returning from the battlefield, ‘no more of soft astral’ hovers around the head of ‘Libertad’ who is now ‘dazzling + fierce with war’s flames’—emphasizing a figure previously excised when appearing as ‘Liberty’. The addition of the ‘war’s flames’ renders the North in an uncharacteristically aggressive posture: it stands with ‘a clench’d and lifted fist’ and with ‘a foot on the neck of the One, the last great Scorner’—a Union revelling in near-victory or postwar power.

In a late essay called “Origins of Attempted Secession”, Whitman maintains that the ‘Northern states […] were really just as responsible for that war […] as the South.’ In this paste-on, Whitman frames the Civil War as an unnamed South invading an unnamed North ‘bearing the murderous knife’. The extraordinary concluding line describing an unidentified ‘Last great Scorner’ as ‘Already a carrion dead, + despised of all the earth – an offal rank | This day to the dunghill maggots spurn’d’ eschews Whitman’s previous championing of the South and Southern institutions. It paints a very different revisory picture of the rebellion as

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47 Moon, Disseminating, 201

driven by parasitic monsters, violent and hate-filled.  Betsy Erkkila observes that Whitman uses this ‘militant and combative language’ in order to ‘affirm his commitment to a democratic order based on “manly affection”.  With this order under threat, its affirmation in ‘militant and combative language’ grows more direct in the Blue Book. The description of the ‘Scorner’ of line six, for example, is shifted through at least four stages, each increasingly aggressive:

1. …one, the Scorner, utterly crush’d before you;
2. …one, the Scorner, utterly crush’d before beneath you;
3. …one, the latest & mightiest Scorner, utterly crush’d beneath you;
4. …one, the latest & mightiest last great Scorner, utterly crushed beneath you

(Blue Book II:114)

This word ‘Scorner’ is added twice again: in line five (revised to ‘braggart’) and line four (as ‘scorn’), characterizing the Confederacy—or any anti-democratic force—as primarily an entity of hate. This struggle for a depiction of the South can be seen in the final triad of terms for the confederacy: ‘dead’ ‘damned’ ‘despised’—the final two remaining in suspension. This phrase ‘the scorner, that would yesterday do so much’ suggests that the paste-on was inserted after the war had concluded—the Blue Book being a patchwork of texts composed sometimes years apart—so the poet may write safe in the knowledge the Union is once again whole. Unspent vitriol pent up over the course of the war is finally allowed release in an explosion of acidic rebukes. To Whitman, these antagonistic statements are in part a bulwark against the incursions of a relentlessly antidemocratic hostile power. As Sweet has argued, ‘[i]n order to affirm the restoration of the Union, Whitman needed to transform such violence into ideologically productive signs.’

To attack the Confederacy is not only to preserve the Union but to preserve the poet’s intimate democratic nationality which allows not only pleasure but unity.

In what is perhaps the most striking reconfiguration of the notion of the Union and of conventional American ideals, the opening lines of “Chants Democratic” 1 are significantly revised. A partial revision of the 1855 Preface that was diced up and moved into shorter lines,

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49 Moon, *Disseminating*, 204
this section holds two prominent paste-ons, one of which oddly covers the poem’s number-title (here, simply a decorative “1”), though indicated to be inserted after line group six:

As if to emphasise the stratifying effects of material insertions, when peeled back after years pressed against the page to which it is attached, acid marks highlight what the paste-on was designed to replace. Text that it was intended to cover it ends up emphasizing or disclosing: a wavering between modes of nation-defining. On the page beneath the paste-on, Whitman, in ink, experiments with notions of national identity and unity. Inscribing and cancelling both an intended title ‘Many In One’, the poet also removes its familiar Latin form as subtitle ‘E Pluribus unum’—what Erkkila has called ‘the revolutionary seal of the American republic.’  

This inserted and removed title holds an uneasy status: both in and out of the book, it brings the nation together in a traditional formula and then abandons such an enterprise.

This familiar American democratic maxim ‘E pluribus unum’ (or its English form ‘Many in One’) is cancelled three times in the Blue Book: twice later in the poem and once in “Proto-Leaf” (Blue Book 1:8). Jay Grossman has observed that in this phrase Whitman makes ‘conflicting claims for Union.’  

In the opening line of “Chants Democratic” 1—called “Poem of Many in One” in the 1856 edition—the phrase ‘A nation announcing itself, (many

52 Erkkila, Political Poet, 50.
in one,’ is revised so that the key fragment ‘many in one’ is removed (Blue Book I:108). Some seventeen pages later, a capitalized version ‘The Many In One’ is again cancelled and replaced with ‘America, isolated yet embodying all’ (Blue Book I:125). The figure of ‘America’, in this insertion, may be ‘isolated’ but is still ‘embodying all’—able to circumscribe an intimate totality. As seen above in the revisions to “Proto-Leaf” in which Whitman modifies the ‘Mistress’ to become the mysterious ‘One that is over all’, the poet also adds the phrase ‘one of many made I over all’ in a pencil insertion (Blue Book I:11). This supplements the 1860 edition’s ‘Many in One’ for the Blue Book’s ‘one of many’—marking an interrelated but competing formulation of Union. ‘As the poet of the many and one,’ Erkkila writes, ‘Whitman sang of individuality, independence, and freedom, yet also uttered the words comradeship, equality, and solidarity.’ Fluctuating between these terms, each citizen of the United States is refocused into an individualistic ‘one’ out of a collective ‘many’—rather than a disparate ‘many’ dissolving into a collective ‘one’.

These revisions are then modified in an inked note above the ornament on the title page, transformed into an attack upon those deemed not American. ‘America isolated I sing,’ Whitman annotates, ‘against the remainder of the earth’ (Blue Book I:108). In its separate scanned version, the paste-on added above appears as the much-revised fragment:

![Figure 35C](https://example.com/figure35c.png)

Transcribed, these lines form the knotted insertions:

American isolated I sing, against all the remainder of the earth;
I say that works, poems, songs, (whether made grown here or imported)
Breathing Conceiv’d in the spirit of other lands, are so much poison to These States.

(Blue Book II:108)

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54 Erkkila, Political Poet, 321.
Combining revisions in ink and pencil that add, cancel, and erase text, the inserted slip is smeared in the erasures of a protracted revisory process—smudges of grey streak across its length. Blurred by indecision or dissatisfaction, this paste-on holds the two-versioned phrase ‘American isolated, I sing’. In one of its iterations added to the title page, this insertion has a puncture in the text—leaving a perforation where an inserted n could have been, the line wavering between an individual ‘American’ and the national state (see Figure 34B above). In its national form (‘America isolated, I sing’), this textual fragment is added five times to the Blue Book: three times to the title page of “Chants Democratic” 1, once in the paste-on, and then again in a heavily revised insertion three pages later (Blue Book I:108, 111). In one of the two additions to the title page the phrase is indicated to be the title of the poem. In this double phrase, the speaker-poet alternates between a separation from all others and a metonymic unification of all Americans under a single figure: a nation alone, at war with itself. At odds with a more open Union celebrated elsewhere in Leaves, these five insertions invoke a nativist isolationism that juts out from the heavily-revised surface of the text. ‘The fervor with which he celebrated the Union made him unjust to other nations,’ writes Roger Asselineau of this addition in the 1867 edition, ‘[t]hus he inserted in “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” these lines full of hatred which he suppressed in later editions’.55 In their Blue Book version, the ‘songs’ that, with evident horror, ‘breathe the spirit of other lands’, in revision ‘breathe out of’, then are ‘breathing’, ‘born’, ‘made’, ‘grown’ and ‘conceiv’d in the spirit of other lands’. These are designated as nothing less than ‘poison to these States’.56

These lines, along with a similar set of insertions that appear three pages later (also with remarkably similar revisions), are all scratched-through with diagonal strokes (Blue Book I:111). Where previously, as Dana Phillips has argued, the entire earth was an ‘American imperium’, in these lines the expanding Union ceases to expand, and turns inward—securing an America not at war with itself but removed from a broader international order and excluding all others.57 This artificial security hints at (or is a product of) its own fragility in an annotation added on the same page but marked for insertion into “Apostroph”:

56 This emphasis on ‘breathing’ the land is repeated in the paste-on attached to the opening of “Chants Democratic” 1: ‘Chant me a poem it said, that breathes my native land’ (Blue Book I:108). In the Drum-Taps poem “Others May Praise What They Like” Whitman writes: “Others may praise what they like; | But I, from the banks of the running Missouri, praise nothing, in art, or aught else, | Till it has breathed well the atmosphere of this river – | also the western prairie-scent, | And fully exudes it again’ (DT:68).
(I must not venture – the ground
under my feet
menaces me – it and crumbles
will not support me,)

(Blue Book I:108)

The uneasy ground of Union, never resolved or solidified during the Blue Book revisions, ‘crumbles’ under the poet’s ‘feet’, it ‘will not support’ him. Amid these agonizing reworkings, revision itself operates as a mechanism that transfers the dissolution of the wounded poet’s Union onto the manuscript—inscribing and transforming the book with its crumbling.
CONCLUSION

The friends that have it I do wrong
When ever I remake a song,
Should know what issue is at stake:
It is myself that I remake.

—W. B. Yeats, “Introduction” to Complete Poems (1908)

During the Civil War, Whitman subjected his private copy of an 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass to a multitude of profound and conflicting revisions: scenes of war and warfare are added, heightened, and drastically revised; the poet’s soldier-lovers are dotted about it, populating the poems with an intimate military presence; the antebellum figures of the Mother and Mistress are connected to a scene of war; foundational American documents and institutions are quietly taken out; the South is both admonished and placated; the presence of enslaved people and the institution of slavery are elided, reworked, and accentuated; the integrity of the national Union is reinforced, broken apart, and set to exclude those not deemed American. In an appropriate Blue Book revision, Whitman remakes the line ‘Walt, you know enough’ to ‘Walt, you contain enough’ (Blue Book I:58).

This thesis has sought to address the perplexities that still (and will always) persist about Whitman’s elusive and mysterious Blue Book: how exactly to read (and extricate and display) the multiform annotations that cover it; how to extract revisory sequences from these annotations; and how to account for its physicality, its markings, manicules and multilevel paste-ons. I have situated my analysis in the in-between space of textual revision: the often-discarded variants that appear in the interstices between versions of a revised text. This is a process that not only brings about new poetic fragments but the possibility of reading them sequentially in the arrested flow of the fluid text. In investigating the shifts and transformations inscribed within this singular copy of an 1860 Leaves of Grass, I have attempted to increase interest in a book that remains extraordinary in the wealth of its revisions and by its muted presence in the critical literature.

Whitman’s annotations are of such spiralling complexity that they fluctuate and bulge Leaves of Grass in so many directions it’s almost impossible to trace them all. Combining an array of material attributes—palimpsestic, scriptic, annotatory—the poet’s teeming Blue Book pulsates with oppositions and discordances that do not resolve into a unity. No single editorial principle appears to override any others. Unstable, unpredictable, and shifting within
an uneven frame, the revisions are neither all of a piece nor able to be easily separated: they wash and tangle with each other, colliding and dismantling potential readings in their stead. Composed at various times and places, these revisions are (at least materially) non-linear; they do not move easily from the first page to the last. No single study may do justice to its labyrinthine complexity, its responsiveness to a historical event so immense it almost liquidates the book’s text—the garbled and disordered state of the artefact in some way echoing the upheavals of the wartime Union. In a notebook from the period Whitman drafted the lines: ‘Schemes, politics fail—all shaken—all gives way | Nothing is sure’. 1 This phrase ‘all gives way’ amply extends to the Blue Book: it is an artefact that offers few certainties. More than a record of the poet’s shifting goals or moods, the book is a revisor’s unfolding response to a war whose record of death and bodily damage he experienced firsthand. Whitman’s beloved Union, so fragile in the years of the first three editions finally came apart after the publication of the 1860 edition. The Blue Book, edited only a few months either side of this conflict, stands as a record of that crisis.

Yet Whitman’s response to the Civil War cannot completely explain his revisions. As Paul Outka has argued there is more to Whitman than history. ‘Poetry,’ he writes, ‘is not merely—or rather, simply—encoded historical information, and the “facts” of history can too easily become a reductive tool, explaining away the potent uncertainty of Whitman’s verse.’ 2 Possibilities for future studies of the Blue Book (each of which is large enough for a study of its own) are immense: the revisions to the geographical span of Whitman’s song; the reworking and assimilation of its text with Drum-Taps; the work of revision on poetic rhythm or sound patterning (a kind of poetics of lyric revision); the substantive changes to the ‘camerado’ and ‘comrade’ figures; its intricate relation with other editions of Leaves; the ‘Soul’ language so often added; its conjunction with contemporaneous Civil War documents—the “Brookyniana” sketches, for example, or the letters, the diaries, or the journalism—among many more. The prospects for analysing the manuscript’s revisions are significant: the book constitutes a rich vein of unmined material, awaiting future inquiries. Computational analysis, the display and analysis of the excision (or addition) of certain terms or the remapping of geographic shifts—say, ‘President’ or ‘Constitution’ or a list of states—could provide a wealth of insight into the manuscript.

In sum, Whitman was a revisor of Wordsworthian proportions. Almost nothing escapes

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1 Walt Whitman, quoted in Erkkila, Political Poet, 197.
his manuscript recastings. These revisions continue to baffle, to provoke and to stimulate, they continue to be productive of new ways to think of Whitman’s ever-shifting verse. If his book is his body and not just its avatar then his revisions are a reworking of that body; they are textual, a memory-body, fleshy now only in word.
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